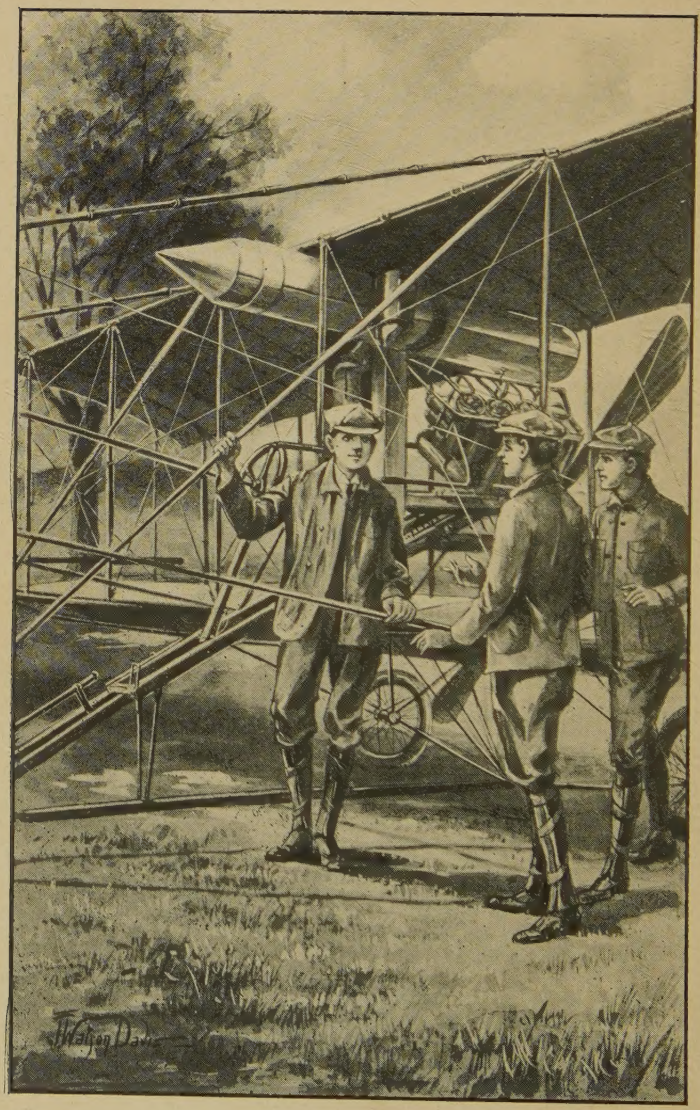
The FLYING MACHINE BOYS ON DUTY

BY FRANK WALTON



Descending from his seat, the aviator was greeted by two boys not far from his own age.

The Flying Machine Boys on Duty

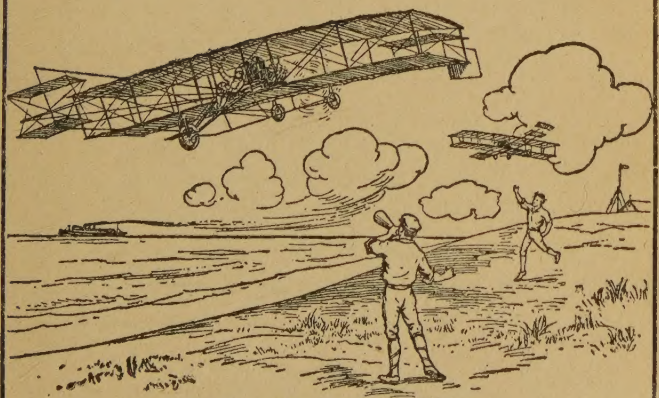
OR

The Clue Above the Clouds

By FRANK WALTON

AUTHOR OF

"The Flying Machine Boys on Secret Service"
"The Flying Machine Boys in the Wilds"
"The Flying Machine Boys in Mexico"



A. L. BURT COMPANY
NEW YORK.

Copyright 1913
By A. L. Burt Company

THE FLYING MACHINE BOYS ON DUTY

THE FLYING MACHINE BOYS ON DUTY

CHAPTER I.

ABOVE NEW YORK BAY.

An aviator, swinging northward in a June twilight, found himself constantly annoyed by the driver of a machine whose only motive in life seemed to be to get in the way. Turn as he might to right or left, sail high or low, the obstinate and impertinent pursurer was always at hand to threaten him.

To the west, lay Bedloe's island, showing the Statue of Liberty, ruddy in the sunlight. To the east, Governor's island presented the battlements of Fort Columbus and Castle William. To the north, or to the northeast, to be more exact, lay Battery park, a smear of green at the lower end of Manhattan island.

For a time people on ferryboats traversing New York bay looked upward in momentary expectation

of a battle in the air. Then the two flying machines passed north along the line of Broadway, crossed over Bronx park, and came to the vicinity of Pelham bay, in Westchester county.

Here the aviator who had shown such pugnacity in his dashes and swirls at the other, and who had been repulsed only by the finest skill and tact, wheeled straight to the west and was soon lost to sight in the gathering darkness.

For a moment it seemed that the aviator who had thus far acted only on the defensive was about to become the aggressor and follow in the wake of his persecutor. In fact, he was about to swing away in pursuit when the ringing of a bell at a hangar below attracted his attention. Then, with a frown showing on a boyish face, he swung to the north a short distance and volplaned to a level space in front of the hangar.

Descending from his seat, the aviator was greeted, rather anxiously it seemed, by two boys not far from his own age. Very little was said until the flying machine had been run into the great shed, and then the three turned away to a rather elaborate office building which stood in a grove of trees at the entrance to the grounds.

A chill wind was blowing off Long Island sound, and the boys found a grate fire burning brightly in a private room at the rear of the structure. They seated themselves before the leaping flames and

looked expectantly into each other's faces for a moment before speaking.

Those who have read the opening volume of this series will need little introduction to James Stuart, Ben Whitcomb and Carl Nichols. Street boys of sixteen, they had, some months before, met Louis Havens, the famous millionaire aviator, and accompanied him on a trip to Mexico which had brought both fame and fortune to every member of the party.

On their return to New York from the "Burning Mountain" the boys had planned a course in college, but, at the request of Mr. Havens, they had promised to undertake a daring commission from the New York chief of police. A short time before their return to the city the night-watchman of the Buyers' Bank had been murdered, the monster safe dynamited, and thousands of dollars in currency and securities taken.

It was believed by the chief of police that the burglars—two of the craftiest and most desperate criminals on the continent—were in hiding in the wild and mountainous region south of Monterey bay, on the Pacific coast.

On the theory that the Flying Machine Boys would be able to visit every nook and corner of the region where the criminals were supposed to be, with comparative ease, in their new and up-to-date machines, and, also, that the appearance of the lads

in that section would not be apt to arouse the suspicions of the hunted men, the chief of police had proposed the journey to Havens, and he had induced the boys to accept the almost princely offer made by the official.

On account of the hazardous nature of the proposed trip, and because of the long distances to be traveled, special attention had been given to the *Louise* and the *Bertha,* the two aeroplanes ordered made by the boys immediately upon their arrival at New York. These machines had been completed the previous day, and the trip over New York bay made by Jimmie Stuart that afternoon had been the first tryout for the *Louise,* a very strong aeroplane, capable of carrying, when necessity required, two passengers and at least a hundred pounds of camp equipage and provisions.

" Who's your friend? " asked Carl Nichols, short, fat, blue of eyes and pink of skin, as the three boys sat before the open grate fire in the private room in the office building at Havens' hangar.

" He's no friend of mine! " Jimmie Stuart, red-headed and freckled-faced, declared. " He picked me up down on the Jersey coast and did his best to get me into a mix-up. I dodged him all the way to Bronx park because, you see, I was not quite sure of my machine."

" Did you get a good look at the fellow? " asked Ben Whitcomb, grave-faced, athletic, and inclined

to worry over troubles which had not yet materialized. "It looked to me as if you might have slapped his face, he was so near to you when you passed over Battery park."

"Oh, yes!" Jimmie answered. "I got a view of his face from almost every angle! He's a low-browed brute, with ears like wings, and a hunch in his shoulders which makes you think of one of the muckers at Croton dam."

"He certainly can run a machine, though!" Carl Nichols declared, "and he has an aeroplane that can go some, too!"

"But what's the idea?" asked Ben. "Why should he be chasing you around in that impudent way?"

"I've got a notion," Jimmie replied, "that he wanted to try out the *Louise*. He resorted to every trick known to airmen to induce me to make some kind of an error in handling the machine. He's an expert himself, and he evidently wanted to know whether I am capable of operating a peach of a flying-machine like the *Louise*."

"I don't believe it was just idle curiosity that made the fellow stick to you in that way," Carl interrupted. "I've been thinking that the purpose of our trip to the Pacific coast may have become known to friends of Phillips and Mendosa, the men who are believed to have dynamited the safe of the

Buyers' Bank and murdered the night-watchman. The crooks may have men on guard here!"

"That seems hardly probable," Ben suggested. "The police have a pretty good case against Phillips and Mendosa, and, so far as my knowledge goes, a crook who stands in the shadow of the electric chair has few friends willing to interest themselves in his behalf."

"Yes, but look here," Jimmie argued, "Phillips and Mendosa lifted thousands of dollars in currency. So far as the officers know they still have the entire proceeds of the robbery in their possession. Even murderers with so many dollars in their possession are not likely to lack capable friends."

"I guess that's right," Carl put in, "and the two murderers will of course scatter money like water in order to keep out of the clutches of the law!"

"Yes," Ben suggested, "the clues point so directly to Phillips and Mendosa that they would naturally spend every dollar they stole in order to keep away from the New York officers."

While the boys talked, the door to the private office opened softly. Mr. Havens stood for a moment on the threshold and then stepped up to the fire. The young man was tall, slender and supple, with a dusky complexion and black hair and eyes. He was twenty-four years of age, but looked much younger. The millions he possessed had been inherited from his father, and instead of spending

them along the Great White Way, he was devoting his entire attention to aviation.

"What's the argument, boys?" he asked, standing before the grate with a smile on his face. "Machines working all right?"

"Finely!" replied Jimmie. "I had a fine ride over the bay this afternoon. The *Louise* motor runs like a watch!"

"I saw you from Battery park," Havens answered.

"Then you must have seen the gink chasing me up?" Jimmie asked, tentatively.

"I noticed that," Havens replied. "What was the occasion of it?"

"That's just what we were discussing," Jimmie said.

"And we had about concluded," Ben interrupted, "that our plans regarding the visit to the Pacific coast must have leaked out."

"That doesn't seem possible!" exclaimed Havens. "Why," he went on, "even the intimates of the chief of police at headquarters know nothing whatever of the matter. There must be some other explanation of what took place this afternoon."

"I have known crooks to have friends among the men higher up!" laughed Jimmie. "It may be so in this case."

"There is one sure thing about it," Havens went on, "and that is that if any hint regarding your

proposed trip in quest of the murderers has by any chance become known to the friends of the crooks, the exact tactics shown this afternoon would be likely to be resorted to."

"Yes," Ben agreed, "it does seem that the first thing the crooks would do would be to prevent our departure for the Pacific Coast. A group of flying machine boys certainly represents a new element in secret service work! We must watch our machines after this!"

"If the fresh aviator really belongs to the crowd of crooks connected with the murderers," Carl broke in, "we'll hear from him again. He'll follow us to the coast! He wouldn't cease his efforts after chasing the *Louise* up New York bay."

"He will have to chase us up if he continues his surveillance, for he won't have long to spy on us here," Jimmie declared. We're to leave for the Pacific coast day after to-morrow, as I understand it!"

"How about to-night?" asked Havens.

The boys sprang to their feet excitedly.

"To-night!" shouted Carl. "That will be fine!"

"That appears to me to be a good way of dodging trouble," Ben acknowledged.

"I'd like to go to-night, all right," Jimmie broke in, "but I'd like to form the acquaintance of that impudent aviator before I go!"

"I have an idea that you'll meet him before you reach Monterey bay!" Havens replied. "You would know him again?" he asked.

"Of course!" replied the boy. "He's a low-browed brute with wing ears and a hunch in his shoulders. I'd know him anywhere."

"Do you really think he'll chase us up?" asked Carl hopefully.

"I certainly do!" answered Havens.

"That will be great!" exclaimed Jimmie. "A flying machine race across the continent surely appeals to me. Are you going along with us, Mr. Havens?" he asked, then.

"I hope so," was the reply, "although I'm not quite sure of getting through with several business deals now under way. However," he went on, "you boys can go on with the *Louise* and the *Bertha* to-night, and I can catch you somewhere on the way over with the *Mary Ann*."

"Not me!" Jimmie laughed. "You can't catch me with the *Mary Ann* as long as I'm on board the *Louise!*"

"We'll decide that point on the way across!" Havens replied.

"Well," Ben suggested, "if we're going to start to-night, we ought to be getting our camp equipment ready."

"Aw, never mind the camp equipment!" exclaimed Jimmie. "We don't want to carry a load

of stuff across the continent. We can carry one light silk tent, like we had in Mexico, and a few provisions, and buy all the mountain outfit after we get in Monterey."

"That listens good to me!" Carl put in. "If Mr. Havens is going to race us for three thousand miles in the *Mary Ann,* we don't want to carry much excess baggage."

"How soon can you get ready, boys?" asked Havens. "My idea is," he went on, "that you ought to get out of the hangar as soon as possible. We may be over-anxious regarding the matter, but it is my belief that you'll be followed unless you get away secretly. Now, you boys all go to bed in the bunks in the hangar and I'll attend to the details. When the tent and provisions are on board, with plenty of gasoline, I'll let you know. Then you can get away at once."

The boys objected to going to bed, declaring that they were too excited to sleep, but at last, in deference to the wishes of Mr. Havens, they sought their bunks. An hour later Jimmie awoke to a sense of suffocation. Ben and Carl were sleeping soundly not far away and the great shed was very still.

As the boy sat up and sniffed the air a burst of flame showed at the front, sweeping fast toward the *Louise* and the *Bertha.*

CHAPTER II.

A SHOT IN THE NIGHT.

THERE was a fairly efficient fire department at the Havens' hangar, and by the time Jimmie was out of his bunk, rolling his chums out on the floor, two streams of water were playing upon the flames.

Contrary to the expectation of the incendiaries, there had been several workmen busy about the office building packing provisions into the smallest space possible and tying oiled silk tents and clothing for transportation on the flying machines. Consequently when the fire burst out at the hangar there was little delay in getting out the firemen.

There were thousands of dollars' worth of property in and about the office building and hangar, and Mr. Havens not only maintained an efficient corps of fire fighters but also kept his possessions there well insured. The fire was extinguished before any damage had been done except to one wall of the hangar.

After the danger was entirely over Mr. Havens and the three boys gathered in the private room of the office building for the purpose of discussing the situation. It was easy to see that the boys were all greatly excited, and that Mr. Havens was decidedly angry.

"You see how it is, boys," the latter said, "you'll have to fight the Phillips and Mendosa gang from now until the two murderers are placed in the electric chair. I fully believe that it was the intention of their accomplices to not only destroy the aeroplanes but to cause your death. It is a desperate gang to battle with."

While the boys talked, laying plans for their guidance while journeying across the continent, Hilton, one of the night-watchmen, knocked softly on the door and then looked in with a frightened face.

"What is it?" asked Havens.

"I presume, sir," the night-watchman answered, "that you heard the shot? It might have been heard a mile, I think, sir."

"We heard nothing of the kind," replied Mr. Havens, rather anxiously. "Tell us something about it."

"It was just after the fire was extinguished," Hilton replied. "We were standing by the door of the little fire-apparatus house when we saw a man sneaking through the shrubbery to the west of the hangar. He turned and ran the minute he saw that he was discovered, but we caught him—a measly little dried up kind of a man, with a face like a monkey."

"Where is he now?" asked Havens.

"Why, that's what I came in to tell you about," Hilton continued, fumbling with his hat, which he held in front of him with both hands. "When we caught him, we took him back to the engine-house and began asking him questions, believing, of course, that it was he who had made all the trouble."

"And what did he say?" demanded Havens, excitedly.

For a moment it seemed that the solution of the fire mystery was at hand. It was probable that the man caught sneaking about the hangar had either been responsible for the blaze or had witnessed the act of incendiarism. They all waited anxiously for Hilton's reply.

"Well, sir," continued the night-watchman, "we stood him up agin' the wall by the engine-house

door and tried to frighten him into answering our questions. He was scared all right!"

"But what did he say?" repeated Havens, impatiently.

"He didn't say anything," was the reply, "and I'll tell you why he didn't say anything. He was under the strong light of the electric in the ceiling of the engine-house. We were all gathered about him, but none of us stood in front. Before he could say a word in answer to our questions, a shot came from out of the darkness and he just crumpled down on the floor. We thought he was dead."

"Did one of my men shoot him?" asked Havens, angrily.

"No, sir," replied Hilton. "Your men were all gathered in the engine-house. The shot came from a point south of the hangar."

"Is the man dead?"

"That's what we can't exactly make out, sir," the night-watchman answered. "He lies perfectly still, but sometimes we think we can detect a flutter of breath at his lips. No, sir, you may be sure that none of your men shot the fellow."

"Who did shoot him, then?" demanded Jimmie, excitedly.

"Wait a moment," said Havens addressing the night-watchman. "Don't offer any theories. Tell us the facts in the case, and then go and see that the man is not permitted to escape."

"I have told you all I know, sir," answered Hilton. "It's just as I tell you. He was in the strong light near the engine-room door, and a shot came out of the darkness and he dropped. Your men were all in the engine-room at the time it happened."

"That's all!" Havens said, abruptly. "See that the fellow is given every attention, and also that he does not escape. Perhaps you would better summon a surgeon. Use the 'phone in the engine-house."

Hilton bowed and turned away, grumbling that workmen were always blamed for everything that took place, whether they were guilty or not. Mr. Havens and the boys sat watching each other with astonishment showing in their eyes for at least a minute after the departure of the night-watchman. Havens was the first to speak.

"What do you make of that, boys?" he asked.

"It seems to me to be a problem easy of solution," Ben answered. "The men who planned the destruction of the building and the death of those sleeping in it employed this man to do their dirty

work. He set fire to the building, but didn't get away in time. The captured man is undoubtedly a fellow not to be trusted, so the chief incendiary shot him in order to close his lips."

"It strikes me," Mr. Havens said, with a laugh, "that you ought to make a pretty good detective. In my opinion, you have grasped the situation exactly."

"Oh, Ben is the only original Sherlock Holmes," laughed Jimmie. "Give him a piece of rock and a blade of grass and he'll tell you how the world was made! He's got the deduction stunt down to cases!"

"You bet he has!" laughed Carl. "Don't you remember how he figured out the Devil's Pool down in Mexico?"

"I guess you all had a hand in that Devil's Pool proposition," laughed Ben. "But, honest, now," he continued, "don't you think the man was shot in order to prevent his snitching on his friends?"

"He certainly was!" answered Mr. Havens. "And now," he continued, rising from his chair and moving toward the door, "it remains for us to determine whether he is dead. If he is dead, that settles the matter so far as we're concerned. If he

isn't, he may be induced by the use of the third degree to betray his accomplices."

"Huh!" laughed Jimmie. "I wouldn't put a sheep-stealing dog through the third degree! They tried it on me once," he continued, "when they found me sleeping in a dry goods box in an alley near where a burglary had been committed. They kept me without sleep or food for two days and two nights, though they had all I knew about the case the first minute."

"You're right about the cops," Carl laughed. "When I write a book descriptive of the criminal classes in the United States, I'm going to give the police the place of honor in the book. If anybody should ask you, you just say that the leading criminal class in the United States revolves around police headquarters."

Havens smiled at the natural enmity of street boys for the police and opened the door. As he did so Hilton again made his appearance in the outer office.

"The surgeon will be here directly," he reported.

"How's the patient?" asked Havens.

"Still unconscious," was the reply, "though he

seems to be breathing a little easier. He's bleeding pretty badly, though."

"You remain here and watch the office until we come back," directed Havens, and in company with the three boys he turned toward the building where the fire-fighting apparatus was stored.

When they reached the place they found the figure of an undersized, wrinkled-faced man of fifty or more lying on the brick floor of the room. There was a pool of blood in view, and a wound in the head showed its source.

Half a dozen men were gathered about the still figure, all looking excited and anxious. Havens bent down and lifted the head from the floor.

"That wound," he decided, "is by no means a fatal one. In fact, I can't understand why he should lie for such a long time in this condition. The bullet merely cut the scalp, it seems to me. Any of you people ever see him before?" he asked in a moment.

The men shook their heads.

"Have you examined his clothing for marks of identification?" asked Havens, then. "He may have letters or something about him which will disclose his name and address."

"No, sir," one of the men answered. "We never thought of that. At least," he went on with a shamefaced grin, "I thought of it just as you came in but, to tell you the truth, I didn't care to touch him."

Jimmie bent down and ran his fingers hastily through the pockets in the clothing of the unconscious man.

"Not a thing!" he said presently. "Not even a lead pencil or a pocket knife! The fellow probably left his card case at home," he added with a chuckle. "We'll have to get his number in some other way."

While they stood talking at the door of the engine-house, a surgeon residing at a village not far away came hastily into the circle of light. After speaking most respectfully to the millionaire and nodding carelessly to the boys, he proceeded to make an examination of the injured man. Havens and the lads stood by waiting anxiously for his decision.

If the man was really likely to die from his wound, that would end all hope of learning from him the names of those associated with him in the crime. If the fellow would soon recover, then a clue to the whole chain forged by the friends of the

murderers for the destruction of the boys might be discovered.

"Well?" asked Havens as the surgeon lifted his face in a moment.

Instead of answering directly, the surgeon sniffed the air.

"You've had a fire here?" he questioned.

"Never mind the fire now," said Havens, impatiently. "Give me your opinion of this man's condition. Is his wound fatal?"

"It is my duty," said the surgeon, with assumed dignity, "to report this case to the police instantly. But," he continued, with a subservient bow in the direction of the millionaire, "I'll give you all the information I can before sending word to the county authorities."

"Holy smoke!" shouted Jimmie. "Why don't you give it, then?"

"Yes, why don't you give it?" added Carl. "What are you waiting for?"

The surgeon regarded the two boys with a glance cold enough to crack the lenses in his eye glasses and turned back to the millionaire.

"The man is not fatally injured," he announced, with a great deal of added dignity. "In fact, I

can't understand why he lies so long in this condition. It can be accounted for, however, on the theory that the bullet in passing along the surface of the skull drove a splinter of bone into the brain. In that case, no recovery can reasonably be expected until after a delicate operation has been performed."

"Well," Havens decided in a moment, "do you know where there is a hospital to which the man may be taken immediately?"

"There are plenty in New York city, of course," suggested the surgeon.

"But," returned Havens, "I don't want him taken to New York city, or even placed in the custody of the officers of Westchester county. My desire is that you have him placed in a private hospital and make him your special charge until you receive different instructions. I have reasons of my own, of course, for taking this course, all of which you shall know in due time. Will you do it?"

The surgeon replied that he should be most happy to oblige the millionaire, and in a short time the wounded man was reposing on a cot in a private room in a private hospital not far from Long Island sound.

"And now, boys," Mr. Havens said after a short time, "the machines are packed, it only remains for you to take your seats and beat the friends of Phillips and Mendosa to the Pacific coast."

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

"We can beat 'em to the Pacific coast, all right!" Jimmie laughed. "Look here," he went on, pointing to the *Louise,* now being run out of the hangar by the workmen. "There's a flying machine that's going to be a world-beater. I ran fifty miles an hour this afternoon, and didn't put on full power, at that! She's a bird, is *Louise!*"

"It isn't always the speed that counts in a flying machine," smiled Havens. "The perfect flying machine is one that is constructed for endurance—one which will fly for days and nights without breaking down—one which can be trusted in the air as you trust a faithful horse on a country road."

"Well," laughed Jimmie, "I think the *Louise* has had plenty of endurance tests, that is so far as her separate parts are concerned. Every piece in her, down to the last screw, has been tested time and

again, and the run yesterday afternoon showed that she worked like a full-jeweled watch."

"And what about the *Bertha,*" laughed Havens, turning to Ben.

"Aw, the *Bertha* isn't in it with the *Louise!*" shouted Jimmie. "I'll race the *Bertha* to Monterey bay for a thousand dollars," he added with a grin. "And I'll win the money, too."

"That will never do, boys," Havens advised. "You've got to keep together and work together all the way across."

"And now," asked Ben, as they all turned toward the machines, glistening now in the brilliant moonlight, "where are we going to land?"

"I'm afraid I haven't explained the details of the trip as thoroughly as I should," answered Havens, "for the reason that I expected to go with you from the start. However, I'll be along before you get to the Mississippi river and post you fully."

"But suppose anything should happen that you should be delayed," suggested Jimmie. "What then?"

"Well," Havens went on, "south of the bay of Monterey, in Southern California, close to the Pacific coast, lies the Sierra de Santa Lucia moun-

tains. On one side the rock runs almost vertically to the ocean, from three to five thousand feet below. On the other side there is a slope of oak and pine and sycamore to a great canyon which stretches between the mountains and the foothills to the line of the Southern Pacific railroad, sixty or seventy miles away.

"This is said by men whom I have consulted to be the wildest and most lawless region in all California. There is a government reservation there, but the forest rangers have hard work keeping fires out of the forest and cattle off the slopes.

"It is believed that Phillips and Mendosa sought this region immediately after the burglary in New York. In fact, the chief of police reports that they are known to have left San Francisco in a steamer bound south ten days after the commission of the crime.

"Now," Havens continued, "these men are beyond the reach of telegraphic or mail service. They can be warned of the approach of officers only by messenger from Monterey, or by mesengers sent through the gulches across from the Southern Pacific line.

"This situation compels us to beat the aero-

plane we saw yesterday afternoon to the Pacific coast," Havens explained.

"But," interposed Jimmie, "the murderers' friends might telegraph to Monterey, or to some point on the railroad, and a messenger might be despatched into the mountains. An arrangement of this sort would certainly inform the murderers in advance of our coming."

"But there is the danger of discovery if messages and messengers are resorted to," Havens continued. "Besides, it is very doubtful if accomplices have been stationed at any station in the vicinity of the mountains. It is more than likely that Phillips and Mendosa entered that wild region with the intention of cutting themselves off from all human kind, leaving friends in New York to look out for their interests here."

"Then," laughed Jimmie, "let Phillips and Mendosa watch out for a freckled-faced boy with red hair, for he's going to cross their life line the first thing they know!"

"Why don't you put out a sign and tell fortunes?" asked Carl, with a grin. "You ought to be able to do that!"

"Ain't I telling the fortunes of these two mur-

derers now?" demanded Jimmie. "The clairvoyants tell you to look out for tall, dark complected men with fierce eyes, if you go to them, and I'm telling these outlaws to look out for a freckled-faced boy with red hair who's going to get their number directly."

"Now there's one more thing I want to tell you for your information in case my departure should be delayed," Havens went on. "It appears that this man Mendosa is a sort of a crank in the matter of diamonds. He is known to possess several stones of considerable value, in addition to small trinkets set with the precious stones. On the morning following the robbery and murder, a small diamond and a tiny, triangular piece of gold were found on the rug in front of the office desk which the burglars cheekily used during the examination of the securities.

"It is believed by the officers that this stone and this piece of gold became detached from a ring worn by Mendosa on that night. The stone looks like one of a cluster, and the triangular piece of gold is unquestionably part of a claw originally used to keep the diamonds in the setting. These two constitute the only clues."

"Are you going to take them with you?" asked Jimmie.

"Certainly," replied Havens.

"Then you want to hustle along with them," laughed Carl, "for we're going to sail right out of the air and light down on top of the two murderers! So we'll need the stone and the triangular piece of gold for comparison. We're going to do this up quick!"

"And now, one last word," the millionaire concluded. "In case I should not reach you before you gain the Pacific coast, my advice is that you approach the mountains from the east during the night time. Then you ought to land on one of the high summits and work out from that point, using your flying machines only for long distance work."

"Of course," laughed Ben, "we can't go sailing over the mountains with our machines in broad daylight, whistling for the outlaws to come out of their hiding-places and be taken back to electric chairs in New York!"

"No, there'll be quite a lot of mountain climbing," advised Havens. "And now," he continued, "that everything is understood and the provisions and tents are snugly packed on the flying machines,

you would better be on your way. It is quite possible that the aviator who chased Jimmie up New York bay yesterday afternoon headed for the west immediately after leaving this vicinity."

"In that case, we'll have to catch him!" Jimmie grinned.

"If we can!" Carl exclaimed.

"Aw, of course we can!" Jimmie returned.

"How fast ought we to travel?" asked Ben of Mr. Havens.

"I think," returned the millionaire, "that you ought to travel about fifty miles an hour for sixteen hours a day. That will give you eight hundred or a thousand miles a day, and also eight hours each night for sleep. That ought to be enough."

The boys all insisted that that would be more than enough, and moved toward their machines.

"Wait a minute!" Ben cried, as he climbed into the seat on the *Bertha,* "who's going to ride with me?"

"You've got most of the equipage and provisions," Havens suggested. "You know," the millionaire continued, "that we couldn't trust Jimmie with the provisions! He'd be stopping in the top

of every tall tree to take a snack, and that would never answer!"

"And you know, too," Carl put in, "that we never could trust Jimmie alone in a flying machine! That's why it's been planned that I ride with him."

"All right, you fellows," grinned Jimmie, "I'll show you who makes the winning in this murder case! Great Scott!" he added with a wrinkling of the nose, "isn't this a wonder? Who'd ever think of sending us boys off into the mountains to do secret service work?"

Havens took out a pencil and began figuring on the back of a letter taken from a pocket.

"According to this schedule," he said in a moment, "you boys ought to reach the bay of Monterey in four or five days. This is Monday. By Saturday morning, then, you ought to have your machines stowed away in one of the gorges facing the Pacific ocean. Can you do it?"

"You bet we can do it!" declared Jimmie.

"And when you need provisions," Havens advised, "get one of the machines out at night and proceed to Monterey, but don't take the aeroplanes into the town; don't attract any attention if you can avoid it."

"Where're you going to meet us?" asked Ben.

"Probably at St. Louis," was the reply. "At the post-office. Look for me there when you arrive."

In a moment the purr of the motors cut the air. The machines ran swiftly, steadily, down the field and swept upward. Havens stood watching them for a long time. The planes glistened like silver in the moonlight, and the song of the motors came to his ears like sweet music. The millionaire loved a flying machine as track-men love a swift and beautiful horse. He finally turned away to find a uniformed messenger boy standing by his side, presenting a yellow envelope.

"What is it, kid?" he asked.

"Message from the hospital," was the answer.

"Who sent it?" asked the millionaire, taking the envelope into his hands and tearing off the end.

"The night matron," was the reply. "She said I had to hump myself."

"That's wrong!" laughed Havens. "She shouldn't expect a messenger boy to hump himself! In fact," he went on, whimsically, "the only time a messenger boy is permitted to make haste is when

he is on his way to a baseball game. That's right, sonny!" he continued.

The boy grinned and made trenches in the smooth earth of the field with the toe of a broken shoe.

Havens glanced casually at the message at first, thinking that perhaps the surgeon might have taken it into his head to report progress in the case of the man so recently placed in his charge. He knew very well that the surgeon would manage to prevent the escape of the prisoner should he regain consciousnes, so he had put that phase of the case entirely from his mind. However, his eyes widened and an exclamation of astonishment came from his lips as he read the note which had been written by the night matron, and not by the surgeon at all.

"Mason, the injured man recently sent here on your order," the note read, "has most mysteriously disappeared from the hospital. Doctor Bolt, the surgeon detailed, at your request, to take charge of the case, decided to watch the man for the night, and so my attendants were withdrawn. The surgeon must have fallen asleep, for in half an hour's time he came running to my door shouting that Mason had escaped. As soon as possible I visited

the room from which the man had disappeared and found the window sash raised.

"There were many footprints in the soft earth under the window—the footprints of men in coarse shoes—and a smear of blood on the window casing disclosed the fact that the injured man had been drawn through the opening. It is quite evident to me, therefore, that the man was carried from the room by some one interested in the case, to which Doctor Bolt only indirectly referred when talking with me. Your presence at the hospital is earnestly requested."

The note was signed, as stated, by the night matron. Scarcely had Havens finished the reading of it when he heard some one stumbling through the darkness, and the next moment Surgeon Bolt, looking crestfallen and excited, stood before him, like a schoolboy anticipating censure.

"Well?" asked Havens rather angrily.

"It's the strangest thing I ever saw!" exclaimed the surgeon. "Mindful of your interest in the man, I decided not to trust him to the care of any of the hospital attendants to-night. After doing what I could for him, I sat down by the side of his bed to read and smoke. My mind was never

clearer or farther from drowsiness than it was at that time."

"Yes," Havens said, in a sarcastic tone, "the result seems to indicate that you were wide awake!"

"I tell you," almost shouted Bolt, "that I was stupefied by the injection of chloroform or some other anesthetic into the room!"

"How could that be possible?" demanded Havens.

"I don't know!" wailed Bolt. "I certainly do not know! The window was closed when I looked at it last, just before I became unconscious. When I came to my senses to find the bed empty, a cold wind was blowing on my face. That is undoubtedly what awakened me. Only for that I might have slept myself to death!"

While the two talked together a watchman from the office building approached and informed Havens that a lady was waiting there to see him.

"That, probably," suggested Bolt, "is the night matron from the hospital. She was making investigations when I left, and promised to come here at once on the discovery of anything new in the case."

Havens hastened to the office building and there,

as the surgeon had predicted, found the night matron waiting for him.

"I can't understand," she said addressing the millionaire abruptly, without waiting for him to speak, "what is going on at the hospital to-night! Immediately after the departure of Doctor Bolt I sent word for every person, man or woman, connected with my service to appear in the reception room. In five minutes' time I discovered that two men employed only three days ago were not present.

"After waiting a few moments for their appearance, I sent a messenger to their rooms. They were not there! Their beds had not been slept in, and every article of wearing apparel belonging to them had been taken from their closets."

"One question," Doctor Bolt said, addressing the matron. "Was any one on watch outside the door of the room in which I was so mysteriously put to sleep?"

"There was no one on watch there," was the reply.

"Then," declared Bolt, "the two attendants who have disappeared injected the anesthetic I have already referred to through the keyhole of the door. After I became unconscious they entered and re-

moved the prisoner. It is all the fault of the hospital!"

The night matron turned up her nose at the surgeon.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIGNITY OF THE LAW.

THE two flying machines, the *Louise,* with Jimmie and Carl on board, and the *Bertha,* with Ben in charge, flew swiftly over the great city, lying before them with its lights stretching out like strings of beads, crossed the North river with its fleets of vessels, and passed on over New Jersey, heading directly for the west.

At first Jimmie and Carl tried to carry on a conversation, but the snapping of the motors and the rush of the wind in their faces effectually prevented anything of the kind. The moon was well down in the west, yet its light lay over the landscape below in a silvery radiance.

Now and then as they swept over a city or a cluster of houses far out on a country road, lights flashed about, and voices were heard calling from below. Ignoring all invitations to descend and ex-

plain their presence there, the boys swept on steadily until the moon disappeared under the rim of the sky.

At first there was the light of the stars, but this was soon shut out by a bank of clouds moving in from the ocean. By this time the boys were perhaps two hundred miles from New York. They were anxious to be on their way, yet the country was entirely new to them, and they knew that a chain of hills extended across the interior farther on, so at last Ben, who was in the lead, decided to drop down and make inquiries as to the country to the west.

Of course the boys might have lifted their machines higher into the air and proceeded on their course regardless of any undulations of the surface, but they were still comparatively new in the business of handling machines, and did not care to take high risks in the darkness.

Jimmie followed Ben's lead, and the two machines groped their way along a tolerably smooth country road and finally came to a stop only a few feet from a rough and weather-beaten barn which stood close to the side of the road.

The clatter of the motors almost immediately

brought two husky farmers into the illumination caused by the aeroplane lamps.

"What you doing here?" one of the men asked.

"Came down to rest our wings," Jimmie replied, saucily.

"Where you from?" asked the other farmer.

"New York," answered Jimmie.

"We're carrying government despatches to Japan," Carl added, with a grin. "We're in the secret service!"

Ben gave the two boys a jab in the back, warning them to be more civil, and, stepping forward, began asking questions of the farmer regarding the country to the west. The two men looked at each other suspiciously.

"Is this him?" one of them asked.

The other shook his head.

"Might be, though!" insisted the first speaker.

"No," replied the other, "this is not the man!"

Ben looked at his chums significantly for a moment. He was thinking that the farmers might be referring to an aviator who had passed that way not long before. He was thinking, too, that that aviator might be the identical one who had started out

to beat the *Louise* and the *Bertha* to the Pacific coast.

"When did you boys leave New York?" one of the men asked, in a moment.

"About midnight," was the reply.

"And you've come two hundred miles in three hours?" asked the man, incredulously. "I don't believe it!"

"Our machines," Ben answered, very civilly indeed, "are capable of making the distance in two hours."

"Well," the farmer went on, "the other fellow said he left New York about dark, and he didn't get here until something like an hour ago. He lit right about where you are now."

"Where is he now?" asked Ben.

"Why, he went on just as soon as he tinkered up his machine."

The boys glanced at each other significantly, and then Ben asked:

"What kind of a looking man was he?"

"He looked like a pickpocket!" burst out the farmer, "with his little black face, and big ears, and hunched up shoulders. And he was, I guess,"

he continued, "for we heard him sneaking around the barn before we came out of the house."

"What did he say for himself?" asked Ben, now satisfied that the man described was the one who had pursued the *Louise* on the previous afternoon.

The two farmers looked at each other a moment and broke into hearty laughter. The boys regarded them in wonder.

"He said," one of the men explained, in a moment, "that he was a messenger of the government, taking despatches to the Pacific coast. If he didn't say almost the same thing you said, you may have my head for a pumpkin."

"And that," added the other man, "is what makes us suspect that you chaps are in cahoots. Mighty funny about you fellows both landing down here by our barn, and both telling the same story! I'm a constable," he went on, "and I've a good mind to arrest you all and take you before the squire as suspicious persons. I really ought to."

"What are we doing that looks suspicious?" demanded Jimmie.

"You're wandering about in the night time in

them consarned contraptions!" declared the other. "That looks suspicious!"

Daylight was now showing in the east, and the sun would be up in a little more than an hour. The boys were positive, from information received from the farmer, that the aviator who had made his appearance on New York bay the previous afternoon was only an hour or so in advance of them. By following on at once they might be able to pass him.

It was their intention now to wheel farther to the south, and so keep out of the path taken by the other. It was their idea to reach the coast, if possible, without the man who was winging his way toward the murderers knowing anything about it.

Of course the fellow would suspect. There was no doubt that he fully understood that the *Louise* and the *Bertha* were to be used in a race to the Pacific. Had he been entirely ignorant regarding the plans of the boys, he would never have found it necessary to follow the *Louise* over New York bay and Manhattan island for the purpose of ascertaining her capability as a flier.

"Well," Jimmie said, after a moment, "We may as well be on our way. We stopped here because

we were afraid of butting into some wrinkle in the old earth if we proceeded in the darkness."

"I don't know about letting you go on!" broke in the constable.

There was greed in the man's eyes. There was also an assumption of official severity as he glanced over the three youngsters. The machines were standing in the middle of a fairly smooth road running directly east and west.

To the right of the thoroughfare stood the shabby barns referred to before. To the left ran a ditch which had been cut through a bit of swamp lying on the other side of the road. As the farmer concluded his threatening sentence, Jimmie and Carl sprang to the *Louise* and pressed the button which set the motors in motion. For a moment the farmers were too dazed to do more than follow the swiftly departing machine with their eyes.

When they did recover their understanding of the situation, they both sprang at Ben in order to prevent his departure. This, doubtless, on the theory that one boy was better than none. If they couldn't get three prisoners, they did not intend to lose the opportunity of taking one.

In carrying out this resolve, the men made a

serious mistake in not seizing the machine. Had they thrown their muscular arms across the planes at one end it would have been impossible for the machine to have proceeded down the road in a straight course.

Instead of doing this, they both made an effort to seize Ben. Now Ben had been in many a rough-and-tumble skirmish on the lower East Side, and knew how to protect himself against such clumsy assaults. One of the farmers cut a circle over the shoulder of the boy as he fell from a hip-lock, and the other went down from as neat a jolt on the jaw as was ever delivered in the prize ring.

While this remarkable contest was in progress, Jimmie was whirling the machine, he had mounted, into the air. When he saw one of the farmers land in the ditch he came swiftly about with a jeer of defiance and thrust an insulting face toward the ground.

"Say, you feller!" he shouted. "That's Billy Burley, the Bruiser. Don't you go to getting into a mix-up with him!"

The man who had tumbled into the soft muck of the trench clambered slowly out and shook his fist at the freckled, scornful face bent above him.

"I'll show you!" he shouted. "I'll show you!"

By this time Ben had taken possession of the *Bertha,* and the motors were clattering down the road. In a second almost the flying machine was in the air, and the boys were off on their journey, leaving the two farmers chasing down the road after them, shouting and waving pitchforks desperately in the air.

It was now almost broad daylight, and the boys sent their machines up so as to attract as little attention as possible from the country below. A few miles from the scene of their encounter they shot off straight to the south, resolved to reach the Pacific coast by way of Kansas and lower California. It seemed to them that the aviator who had preceded them had purposely lingered in order that they might come up with him. This looked like trouble.

If it meant anything at all, it meant that if possible they were to be interfered with on their way across the continent. This prospect was not at all to their liking. They wanted to the get to the Pacific coast as soon as possible and begin the quest in the mountains.

Shortly after five o'clock they saw the city of

Baltimore stretched out below them. Deciding that it would be much better to land some distance from the city and prepare breakfast out in the open country than to attract universal attention by dropping down in the city, Ben volplaned down on a macadamized highway some distance out of the town. Jimmie followed his example at once, and before long a small alcohol stove was in action, sending the fragrance of bubbling coffee out into the fresh morning air. Even at that early hour half a dozen loungers gathered about the machines, gazing with wondering eyes at the youthful aviators.

The boys explained the object of their journey in the first words which came to their lips, which, it is unnecessary to state, were highly imaginative, and the loungers stood about watching the boys eat and drink and asking questions concerning the mechanism of the motors.

After eating and inspecting the machines the boys started away again. At the time of their departure there was at least half a hundred people standing around, hands in pockets, mouths half open.

The boys passed over Washington in a short time and glanced down at the great dome of the capitol and at the towering shaft of the Washington monu-

ment. The machines, however, were going at a swift pace, and the many points of interest at the capital of the nation soon faded from view.

About every two hours all through the day and early evening the boys came to the surface at some convenient point and rested and examined their machines. The motors were working splendidly, and the lads were certain that if it should become necessary they could make five hundred miles without a halt. This was at least encouraging.

When night fell they found themselves not far from St. Louis. They dropped down in a lonely field about sunset and built a roaring camp-fire. There was not a house in sight, and the field where the machines lay was surrounded by a fringe of small trees. Ten or fifteen miles to the west rolled the Mississippi river and beyond lay the paved streets of St. Louis, where they were to meet Havens.

The day's journey had been a most successful one. Jimmie was certain that at times the *Louise* had traveled at the rate of a hundred miles an hour. There had been no accidents of any kind.

"From New York to the Mississippi in one day appears to me to be going some!" declared Jimmie,

" and I never was so tired in my life. We can't go on to-night if we are to meet Havens in St. Louis to-morrow, and so I'm going to get out one of the oiled silk shelter tents and go to bed."

While the boys planned a long night's rest the whirr of motors came dully from the sky off to the north.

CHAPTER V.

A CHANGE OF SCENE.

"WHAT we ought to do now," Doctor Bolt declared, as the night matron, indignant chin in air, turned toward the door of the private room, "is to notify the officers of Westchester county."

"I don't see the necessity for that," Havens replied. "One may as well look for a pearl in a train-load of oysters as to look for that fellow in Westchester county to-night. Depend upon it, the men who sought employment at the hospital a few days ago were sent here because the hospital happened to be near my home."

The night matron shrugged her shoulders and passed a scornful glance at the surgeon. The surgeon turned angrily away.

"That relieves me of a great responsibility," she said. "Ordinarily one becomes responsible for the actions of employes, but when men are sent into

your service by a criminal gang for a criminal purpose, responsibility ought to end there."

"I don't agree with your reasoning at all!" declared the surgeon. "One should know better than to employ strangers in positions of trust."

"And when," continued the night matron, glaring at the surgeon, "a country doctor takes it upon himself to override the rules of a hospital and keeps watch beside a patient to the exclusion of the regular attendants, one certainly should not be held accountable for the safety of that patient. And that's all I have to say," she added.

"Settle the responsibility as you will," Havens broke in. "I have nothing to do with that. What I want now is a promise from each of you that nothing whatever shall be said regarding the matter until private detectives shall have an opportunity to recapture the escaped prisoner."

"But why the secrecy?" asked the night matron.

"It is my duty as a surgeon to report the entire matter to the police," shouted Bolt. "I shall do so at once."

Havens argued with the two for a long time, and finally secured a promise that nothing would be said either of the capture or the escape for three days.

The millionaire's idea was to get the prisoner into his own hands if possible. He knew that the fellow would have a hundred chances of escaping without ever revealing the story of the crime he had committed that night with the police, where he would have not one if guarded by private detectives.

He was well satisfied from the incidents of the night that some person high up in the councils of the police department had leaked in the matter of the employment of the boys on the murder case. He believed, too, that the same influence which had been able to secure the carefully guarded information would be powerful enough to protect the escaped prisoner in case he should regain consciousness and, on promise of immunity, threaten to disclose the names of his accomplices in the incendiary act.

After exacting the promise from the surgeon and the night matron, Havens ordered every workman about the place to remain on guard until morning, and, calling his chauffeur, departed for New York in a high-powered touring car. Worn out with the anxiety and exertions of the night, he fell asleep on the soft cushions of the machine, and awoke only when the chauffeur shook him gently by the shoulder

and announced that they were at the Grand Central station.

"And I'd like to ask you a question, sir," the chauffeur said, as Havens stepped out of the car. "It's about what took place on the way down."

"What took place on the way down!" laughed the young millionaire. "It has all been a blank to me. I must have slept very soundly."

"Indeed you did, sir," replied the chauffeur, "and that's why I didn't wake you. You seemed to need the sleep very much, sir."

"Well, tell me what happened?" Havens said impatiently.

"Why, sir," the chauffeur went on, "a big car picked us up half a mile this side of the hangar and followed on down to within three blocks of this place. When I drove fast, they drove fast; when I slowed up, they slowed up, too. Very strange, sir."

"Why didn't you investigate?" asked Havens angrily.

"You see that marble column at the corner of the building," declared the chauffeur, pointing. "Well, I stopped once to ask questions of the chauffeur in the other car, and that marble column I'm pointing out, sir, would be just as communicative as that

other chauffeur was. He only grunted when I asked questions and kept right on as before."

Havens thanked the man for the information and went on about the business which had brought him to the city. He was busy all day with lawyers and brokers and real estate managers, and was very tired and sleepy when night fell. It had been his intention to take an afternoon train for St. Louis, but his business had not permitted of so sudden a departure from the city.

He regretted extremely that he had not arranged with the boys to wire their address in the Missouri city. However, he thought, the boys would wait at least twenty-four hours at the point selected, and this delay would enable him to overtake them by train at Denver. He was positive that he could do so if he could catch the Overland Limited at Chicago.

Eight o'clock found him sound asleep in the stateroom of a Pullman car due to start for the west in an hour. He was so tired that the noises of the station; the arrival and departure of trains; the calls of the train starters; the rattling of the couplings under vestibules, soon died away into a dull blur, and then he passed into a dreamless sleep.

His last memory was of a powerful light shining through a slender crack in the drawn blind of a stateroom window. When he awoke again the slender finger of light had become a deep red glow the size of a pail, and the perfumed air of the stateroom had, somehow, taken on the close and unsavory smell of a riverside basement.

Havens made an effort to lift his hands to his head, but found that he was unable to do so. The great red light was staring viciously into his smarting eyes so he closed them, turned his head aside, and lay for a moment in silent thought.

He had no idea as to where he was, or how, or how long ago he had been transported to that villainous place. He knew that violence had been used, for there was a trickle of moisture on his forehead which could not be the result of heat or exertion. There was a smart there, too, and so the moisture must be blood.

The air was thick and damp, bearing the odor of long confinement in filthy quarters. Opening his eyes, directly, he saw that the walls were dark, but not with paint or paper. They were stained with the mold and unsavory accumulations of many years.

The light which shone in his face came from an electric contrivance which seemed at that moment to be a long distance off. Finally, after much study and many smarting examinations, he saw that it was a light nodding and swaying on a mast, and that it shone through the dirty panes of a window before entering the gloom where he lay.

It was plain to the millionaire, then, that, in some mysterious manner, he had been taken from the stateroom and conveyed to one of the disreputable resorts on the river front. He had no idea as to whether he was looking out on the East river or the North river. All he knew was that his hands and feet were tied; that his head ached furiously, and that his lips and tongue were parched with thirst. In a moment he heard a door open and then an old woman, toothless and shrunken of shoulders, stood before him, bearing in her hand a smoking kerosene lamp.

"Well, dearie," she said with a wicked leer in her watery old eyes.

Havens indicated by motions of his lips and tongue that he needed a drink of water. The old woman had undoubtedly been prepared for this, for she drew a flask of spirits from a capacious pocket

in her clothing and held it exultantly before the eyes of the captive.

Havens shook his head.

"It will give you strength," pleaded the hag. "Strength for what you've got to endure. Better take a drop or two!"

In a moment the young millionaire managed to say that he wanted water, and the old hag, with the air of one who considered that a weak-minded man was turning away a blessed boon, restored the bottle to her pocket and brought water in as filthy a tin cup as Havens had ever set eyes on.

The woman eyed him curiously as she held the cup to his lips.

After draining the cup Havens found strength to ask:

"How did I come here?"

"The boys brought you," was the reply.

"The boys?" repeated Havens. "What boys?"

"The boys always will be having their sport!" the old woman answered indefinitely. "Very bad boys, I'm sure."

"Why?" demanded the millionaire.

"Oh, my, oh, my!" exclaimed the old hag.

" You mustn't ask so many questions. I'm not here to answer questions."

" How much do they want? " demanded Havens, coming at once to the point, as there was no doubt whatever in his mind that he had been abducted purely as a financial speculation. " How much? "

The old hag shook her head gravely.

" After a few days," she said, " the boys will listen to talk of money. Just now," she went on, " your society is what they desire."

Then, for the first time since his rude awakening, the events of the night before flashed across the brain of the millionaire. He remembered the pursuit of the *Louise,* the act of arson at the hangar, the shooting of the stranger, and the escape from the hospital. To his mind, also, came with double force and meaning of the story the chauffeur had told of the pursuing car. With all these memories in his mind he had little difficulty in associating his present situation with the efforts which had been made to prevent the departure of the boys for the Pacific coast.

" How long do you intend to keep me here? " he asked in a moment.

Again the old woman shook her head.

"I'll give you ten thousand dollars," he said, "if you'll set me down at the Grand Central station in an hour."

"Not near enough, dearie," the old hag replied, a greedy gleam coming into her watery eyes. "Not near enough, dearie!"

"Twenty thousand!" exclaimed Havens.

The old woman glanced about the apartment cautiously.

CHAPTER VI.

A SMALL EXPLOSION.

"Now," suggested Ben as the purr of the motors came softly on the evening air, "do you suppose Havens has really caught up with us?"

"Impossible!" cried Jimmie, "we've stopped a good many times on the route, but he couldn't overtake us, for all that, for the reason that he wouldn't leave New York before afternoon. According to that we would have at least ten hours the start of him."

"That's right!" Ben agreed. "Perhaps the motors we hear belong to the flying machine of some sport out for a twilight ride. There are a good many aeroplanes passing between St. Louis and the east at this time of the year. We may hear other machines before morning."

"Suppose," Carl suggested, with a startled expression in his eyes, "that the clatter in the sky is

caused by the flying machine operated by the fellow who chased Jimmie up New York bay?"

"Then that would mean trouble," Jimmie grinned. "But, say!" he went on in a moment. "I wouldn't mind meeting that fellow where the going was good. I'd show him that his machine is a back number."

The boys searched the sky eagerly for a light which would indicate the position of the aeroplane. After a long time they saw a faint gleam almost directly overhead. The airship seemed to be descending.

"I wish we hadn't built this fire," Ben suggested.

"Suppose we put it out!" Carl advised.

"No use now," Ben put in. "The fellow knows exactly where we are. Besides," he went on, "if we should attempt to leave our present location, the clatter of the motors would show him exactly where we landed."

"Then all we've got to do," Jimmie explained, "is to remain right here and watch our machines all night. That's what I call a downright shame!"

"We don't have to all watch at the same time," Ben advised. "You boys go to sleep after we get our supper and I'll stick around until midnight.

Then one of you can go on guard until four in the morning and the other watch until we get ready to leave."

"That's about the way we'll have to do it," Jimmie responded, "only," he went on, "if the fellow makes his appearance at the camp and tries any funny business, the one on watch must wake the rest of us."

This being agreed to, the boys ate a hearty supper and Jimmie and Carl crawled into a hastily set up shelter-tent and were soon sound asleep. Ben did not remain by the camp-fire after that. Instead, he took a position beyond the circle of light, from which the machines were in full view, and watched and listened for the appearance of the mysterious aviator.

Directly the whirr of the motors came louder, and the boy saw the bulk of an aeroplane outlined against the field of stars above.

It was quite evident that the stranger was seeking a place to land, and Ben, resolving to take the initiative, hastened out into the field swinging an electric searchlight.

"Now," he thought, "we'll see if this fellow wants to meet us face to face, or whether he wants

to sneak about in the darkness in order to work mischief to our machines."

After the boy had waved his searchlight for a moment a shout came from above, and a machine every bit as large and as finely finished as the *Louise* came volplaning down to the field.

The rubber-tired wheels had scarcely ceased revolving in the soft earth when Ben stood by the side of the machine, from which a man of about thirty years—a tall, slender man, with very blue eyes and a very blond head—was alighting.

"Hello, son!" the man exclaimed, as he came up to where the boy was standing, "are you out on a trip for your health, too?"

"That's about the size of it," answered Ben.

"Where from?" was the next question asked.

"New York city," was the reply.

"Good old town!" exclaimed the stranger, walking toward the fire as if inclined to make himself quite at home.

"You bet it is!" answered Ben, following along close by his side and watching his every move with suspicion.

The boy regretted now that he had not awakened his chums before giving the signal to the stranger.

There was no knowing what the man might attempt to do. Ben did not fear physical violence for he considered himself more than a match for the intruder. But he knew that a stick of dynamite or some other destructive explosive tossed into the mechanism of the machines would render them absolutely useless.

For this reason he watched the visitor closely, never taking his eyes from the rather large and ham-like hands which swung pendulously at his sides. The stranger did not appear to notice the attention he was receiving.

"What I came down for," he said as he approached the camp-fire and stood warming his hands before the blaze, "was to ask questions."

He smiled brightly as he spoke and gave a searching glance at the shelter-tent where Jimmie and Carl were sleeping.

"It's easy enough to ask questions," suggested Ben.

"Easier than to get them answered," responded the other. "I found that out this afternoon."

Ben eyed the stranger in wonder but asked no questions.

"About the middle of the afternoon," the man went on, "I came upon a machine lying in a little

dell back in Indiana. I shot down with something like the nerve I exercised in visiting you, and began talking with the aviator. He certainly was about the most insignificant looking specimen of humanity I ever saw."

"Wait a minute," smiled Ben. "He had a small, weazened face, large, wing-like ears, and hunchy shoulders—shoulders which give one the impression that he has spent the most of his life at the end of a mucker's shovel in the subway. Is that a good description?"

"A better one than I could have given!" answered the stranger. "You must have seen him somewhere. I hope your experience with him was not so unfortunate as mine."

"He made you trouble, did he?" asked Ben.

"He stole a pocketful of spark plugs," was the reply.

"Yet you seem to be traveling all right," suggested the boy.

"Oh, he didn't get all I had," was the answer. "I volplaned down to him, and he invited me to partake of a lunch he was serving himself on the grass. Just for form's sake, I sat down with him. Then he began asking questions. He wanted to know

where I came from, if I had seen any other machines in the air that afternoon, and if I had heard anything of two aeroplanes starting out on a journey across continent to the Pacific coast. After a time his questions became personal."

"And you answered them, I suppose!" laughed the boy.

"No, I didn't," returned the stranger. "I closed up like a clam in a short time, and then he arose and, without my permission, began examining my machine. To make a long story short, he got the spark plugs out of a box under the seat without my knowing it. I never discovered the loss until I was some distance away."

"You left him there in the dell you speak of?" asked Ben.

"Yes, I left him there in a little hollow between two hills."

"Why didn't you go back after you had discovered your loss?" asked Ben, suspiciously. "You might have caught him if you had gone back."

The firelight was uncertain, and the visitor's face was turned half away, but Ben was almost certain that he saw the red blood mounting to his temples. The man also seemed embarrassed by the question.

"I did go back," he answered after a moment's hesitation, "but the fellow had disappeared. I thought this might be his fire."

There was a short silence, during which Ben poked aimlessly at the burning brands and the stranger looked critically around the camp. In a moment, with a complimentary remark regarding the *Louise* and the *Bertha,* the intruder arose from the ground where he had been sitting and walked carelessly toward the machines. Ben followed him, watching every movement as if his life depended upon the scrutiny.

The two machines stood quite close together, and as the stranger approached them Ben stepped a pace in advance and whirled about. The stranger started back with an exclamation of surprise.

We don't permit strangers to inspect our aeroplanes," Ben said.

"Pardon me," the other smiled, "I really didn't mean any harm. It is quite natural that one should desire to inspect a beautiful machine."

The stranger kept pushing on, and at last brought his thin body into contact with the boy's sturdy one. There was no doubt in the mind of the boy now that the fellow was there for mischief. He

struck out swiftly from the shoulder, but the intruder dodged the blow neatly and, taking a package from the right-hand pocket of his coat, hurled it toward the aeroplanes. Ben's clenched fist caught the other's arm as the throw was released, and the missile, whatever it was, went wide of the mark.

Ben saw the glitter of a shining surface in the firelight, and the next instant an explosion which seemed to shake the earth sounded in his ears. Without waiting to see the effect of the explosion, the stranger faced about and ran at full speed toward the spot where he had left his aeroplane.

Ben followed him a few paces and then, deciding that it would be unsafe to leave the machines, turned back toward the camp-fire to see Jimmie and Carl come tumbling out of the shelter tent, rubbing their sleepy eyes. What Ben feared was that a second person had landed from the stranger's machine before it had shown above the camp-fire.

"What's coming off here?" demanded Jimmie.

"Gee!" exclaimed Carl, "I thought that was the crack of doom!"

"Get down to the machines, quick, you boys!" Ben cried out. "There may be some one trying to work them an injury."

The two boys darted away, stopping only to secure electric flashlights, and were soon seen examining the aeroplanes. Ben waited a moment for some indications that the boys had met with a lurking enemy, and then started away in pursuit of the treacherous aviator.

He was not in time, however, to stop the fellow before his machine launched into the air. As his aeroplane rose, Ben saw that he swung his face for an instant toward the camp. For only a moment the light of the fire shone on the face so turned back. Ben thought he had never seen a more villainous expression on any human countenance.

The boy returned to the machines and joined his chums with an angry scowl on his face. He was angry at himself for having for a minute regarded the stranger in a friendly spirit.

"Where's the artillery?" asked Jimmie, flashing his light about the aeroplanes. "I thought I heard cannonading."

As briefly as possible, Ben explained what had taken place, and the three walked over to the spot where the missile had struck and exploded. There was a great hole in the ground, and tiny fragments

of a tin can lay scattered about, lying at some distance from the hole.

"Nitroglycerine!" exclaimed Ben, picking up one of the fragments.

"That only goes to show," Jimmie answered, wrinkling his freckled nose, "that this trip of ours is not at all like a Sunday School picnic. I wish we had caught him before he mounted his machine," he went on. "I'd like to fill him so full of holes that he could go away and play that he was a Swiss cheese."

There was very little sleep in the camp that night. The boys were away at daylight, and a couple of hours later saw the machines snugly tucked away in a hangar not far from the aviation field near Forest Park.

They waited about the post-office, taking turns watching at the general delivery window, until nearly noon but, as the reader well understands, Havens did not make his appearance. Their vigil during the afternoon produced no better results. Toward evening they tried to reach Havens by wire in New York, but their dispatches met with no response for a long time. At last a message

came from the millionaire's private office at the hangar in Westchester county.

It was very brief, and gave only the information that Havens had taken a stateroom for St. Louis the previous evening, and that he had mysteriously disappeared before the train had left the city.

"That's a knock-out!" exclaimed Jimmie.

"And now," asked Ben with a puzzled look, "shall we go back to New York and help find Havens, or shall we cross the continent in quest of the burglars?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE SIGNAL FIRE.

"I'LL tell you what it is," Jimmie said, as the boys sat in a little restaurant on Fourth street, discussing the situation, "if we turn back to New York now, we'll be off the beat. Havens told us to go out to Monterey, didn't he?"

"He certainly did!" answered Carl.

"Well then," continued Jimmie, "we ought to go on to Monterey. Look here, kids," he went on, "we don't know what took place in New York after we left. We don't know that Havens didn't disappear from that stateroom for the sole purpose of getting out of the way of the fellows who tried to burn his hangar. What do you think of that idea?"

"It appears to me to be a sound one," Ben responded. "Mr. Havens may have met with members of the gang we are fighting. In that case it

would be nothing strange if he managed a mysterious disappearance for his own protection. Would it, now?"

And so, after canvassing the subject thoroughly, the boys decided to go on to the Pacific coast. It was decided, too, that they should leave that very night and travel at an altitude which would render collisions with uplifting summits impossible. They were on their way in an hour from the time the decision was reached.

The boys speak to-day with reverence when referring to that all-night ride. At first the clouds hung low, and they seemed sailing through great fields of mist with neither top nor bottom. Then a brisk wind scattered the moisture in the air, and they sailed for a time under the stars. Later, there was a moon, and under its light they sailed lower, watching with excited interest the lights in the towns they passed, the shimmer on the water they crossed, and the incomparable light reflecting on the smooth green leaves of the forests they shot by.

At daylight they came down on an eminence from which the landscape for miles around could be seen. Below the slope of the hill lay a verdant valley in which nestled a small settlement. At the sum-

mit where the machines lay there were great wide stretches indicating the action of waves at some far-distant, prehistoric time.

The boys were well-nigh exhausted with their long ride. As is well known, the endurance record is not much longer than the time the boys had spent in the air. Besides being cramped in limb and heavy from lack of sleep, the boys shivered because of the altitude at which they had traveled.

When the sun rose it shone with generous warmth upon the ridge where the boys lay, and they basked in its light with many expressions of joy.

"Here's the place where we sleep!" exclaimed Carl. "We can watch the sky and the surface of the earth for miles around," he added, "and can finish any ordinary sized nap in peace."

"I'll watch," promised Ben.

"You'll not!" exclaimed Jimmie. "You watched night before last."

"And came near getting the machines blown up, too," Ben commented.

It was finally arranged that Jimmie and Carl should remain awake for a couple of hours each, after which a hasty breakfast was prepared and the boys settled down for a long rest. Ben and Jimmy

were soon asleep, and Carl, sitting on the ground near the *Louise* was feeling like going to bed himself when a small red head was poked over the edge of the summit and a shrill voice cried out:

"Hello, Mister!"

"Hello, yourself!" answered Carl.

The boy, a mite of a fellow not more than ten years of age, fully as freckled-faced and as red-headed as Jimmie, now approached the aeroplanes cautiously, his wide mouth breaking into a grin as he advanced.

"Them your machines?" he asked, pointing with a dirty finger.

"Sure they are!" answered Carl. "Ever see one before?"

The boy shook his head while his eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Give me a ride!" he demanded.

"Not yet," replied Carl with a laugh. "We're going to remain here for some little time."

"If I stay, can I go with you?" the boy asked.

"I should say not!" replied Carl. "What would your folks say if we should take you away in a flying machine?"

"I ain't got no folks!" was the reply.

"Where do you live?"

The boy pointed down toward the little settlement in the valley.

"Do your parents live there, too?" asked Carl.

"I done told you I ain't got no folks!" insisted the youngster.

"Well, where do you sleep and get your eatings, then?" demanded Carl.

"Sleep in barns!" was the reply. "And don't get many eatings. That's what makes me so little and thin!"

"Do they sell gasoline down there?" asked Carl.

"Yessir!" was the short reply.

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do," Carl proposed. "If you'll go back to the store where they sell it, and get the boss to bring us a sixty gallon barrel, I'll give you a dollar."

"Quit your kiddin'!" exclaimed the boy.

"Sure, I'll give you a dollar," promised Carl, "and I'll give it to you in advance. Can they get up on this hog's-back with a wagon?" he added.

"They sure can," was the reply. "There's a road that climbs the hill out of the valley, and I guess they can gee-haw their old delivery wagon along the ridge, all right."

"Well, go on, now," Carl exclaimed. "Go on and order the gasoline."

"Where's the dollar?" demanded the youngster.

Carl tossed him a silver dollar with a laugh, and saw the boy's bare feet twinkle as he disappeared down the slope. As a matter of fact, he had little hope of ever seeing the boy again, or of having the message delivered. Still, the little fellow looked so ragged, and forlorn, and hungry, that he would have given him the dollar if he had known that the boy would neither deliver the message nor return.

In an hour or so, however, the boy poked his red head over the summit again and came bounding up to where Carl sat.

"It's coming!" he cried. "The wagon left the store at the same time I did, and I beat 'em to it! Say," he added with a chuckle, "the driver made an awful row about coming along this ridge, and I told him you'd be apt to give him a dollar extra. Goin' to do it?"

"Of course!" laughed Carl. "Anything you say goes. For the time being, you are the purchasing agent for this outfit."

When at last the delivery wagon with the barrel of gasoline came bumping along the surface of the

hill, the driver leading the horse, the boy began a knowing inspection of the flying machines, as if determined to give the delivery boy the impression that he had already become a member in good standing of the party. This was very amusing to Carl.

The driver unloaded the barrel of gasoline, received his pay and his tip and then stood with his hands on his hips surveying the two aeroplanes critically.

"There's one of them things lying busted on the other side of town," he said directly.

"Some one have an accident?" asked Carl.

"I dunno," was the reply. "Sol Stevens drove in to sell his hogs, a little while ago, and he said he saw one o' them busted airships lyin' busted by the road out near the Run."

"How far is that from here?" asked Carl.

The delivery boy looked over the landscape, as if estimating distances, and at the same time establishing his own importance, and answered that it was not far from ten miles.

Ben and Jimmie, awakened by the rattle of the rickety wagon wheels, now came out of the shelter tent and joined in the conversation. They looked curiously at the boy for a moment, and then turned

their attention to the driver, listening intently to his repetition of the brief story of the wrecked aeroplane.

"Well," the driver said presently, beckoning to the boy, "we may as well be going, Kit."

"I'm going with the machines!" answered the boy.

Ben and Jimmie looked from Kit to Carl but said nothing.

"Ain't I going with the machines?" demanded the youngster of Carl.

"What would your folks say?" demanded Ben.

"Huh!" said the delivery boy. "He hain't got no folks. He just sleeps around and gets his meals wherever he can."

"I sent him after the gasoline," Carl explained, "and paid him in advance. He came back all right."

"Did you think I wouldn't come back?" asked Kit, indignantly.

Before the question was answered, Jimmie pulled Ben lustily by the sleeve. Carl saw what was in the boy's mind and remained silent.

"Come on, let's take him!" Jimmie urged. "He's all right."

"I'm willing," replied Ben. "In fact, I'm get-

ting tired of riding alone in the *Bertha.* The little fellow will be good company."

The delivery boy departed quickly, and Kit at once began making himself useful, assisting Jimmie in the preparation of dinner.

"Don't you ever think I can't cook!" Kit exclaimed, as he sat by the fire watching the skillet of ham and eggs. "Don't you think I don't know how to get up a square meal. I've helped cook lunches many a time."

"Perhaps we'd better make you chef of the expedition!" laughed Ben.

There seemed to be something on the boy's mind as he gave his attention to potatoes roasting in the hot ashes, and after a time he turned to Carl with a puzzled face. His brows were puckered as he asked:

"Why didn't you ask the delivery boy about that smashed machine?"

"I did ask him about it," replied Carl. "You heard me."

"Well you didn't ask him about the man that got smashed up in it," continued Kit. "The man who got smashed up in it," the boy went on, "hid in Robinson's barn, where I slept last night, and lay

groaning and whining with a broken arm so that he kept me awake. This morning, when he saw me, he gave me a dollar to get a doctor there without telling anybody, and I went and got Doctor Sloan. I promised not to say a word about it, but you boys have been mighty good to me, and I think you ought to know."

"What kind of a looking fellow is he?" asked Carl.

"A monkey-looking fellow, with hunched shoulders and ears like cabbage leaves," replied the boy. "He don't look good to me."

The boys heard the description of the wrecked aviator with undisguised pleasure. At least one of their pursuers had been put out of the running, for the time being. This, they thought, increased their chances of reaching the Pacific coast in advance of any friends of the outlaws.

"Where did the man go after Doctor Sloan set his arm?" asked Ben.

"He said he was going to the nearest railway station and return to Denver," was the reply.

"Machine quite busted up?" asked Jimmie.

"That's what he told the doctor," replied Kit. "He swore awfully while he was talking about it.

And look here," the boy went on, "after he left I picked up a letter which fell from a pocket of his coat when he took it off to have his arm set."

The boy presented a yellow envelope, sealed but not stamped, as he spoke. Ben took the letter and, without any compunctions of conscience whatever, opened it. It contained a sheet of paper, blank with the exception of four words. Ben studied the writing for a moment and passed the sheet to Jimmie. The boy in turn handed it to Carl.

"At Two Sisters canyon!" Carl read.

"Now what does that mean?" asked Jimmie.

"Why, you boy," Carl explained, "it means that this busted aviator was headed for a canyon in the mountains known as the Two Sisters. Do you get that? What else would he have this letter for?"

"That's the first bit of luck we've struck since we started out on this journey!" declared Ben. "I guess, Kit," he went on, "that you must be a mascot. What do you know about that?"

"Oh, I'm a mascot all right!" grinned the youngster.

When the boys started away to the west again Kit occupied a seat on the *Bertha*. Satisfied that they had distanced at least one of their pursuers,

and encouraged by the thought that their way might now be clear, the boys made few stops of any length on their way to the Pacific.

Three days later Sierra de Santa Lucia loomed up before them. It was then twilight, and against the darkness rose the flames of a signal fire!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LOSS OF A BOY!

"THEY seem to be celebrating our arrival," Ben said, looking down on the signal fire with a grin, "only I don't hear any bands," he continued, as the flames streamed up and cast a red light over the waters of the Pacific ocean.

"That's about the strangest proposition I ever came across," Carl said, looking down on the dark canyons, laying like black lines in a drawing, on the landscape below. "I'd like to know what it means."

"Don't you ever think," Jimmie went on, "that Phillips and Mendoza have anything to do with that fire! That beacon light was put there for some purpose by an entirely different set of outlaws."

"But why 'outlaws'?" asked Carl. "The people we see about the fire may be fishermen, and there are lime quarries and kilns somewhere in this section, and these men may be signaling to schooners."

Below the aeroplanes lay a great peak extending four thousand feet above the level of the sea. To

the west the Pacific beat fiercely against its side. To the south the Sierra raised its lofty crags, apparently, straight out of the ocean. To the north a succession of summits lifted above the range. Off to the east lay a faint trail connecting, by devious turns and twists through the mountain wilderness, with the Southern Pacific railroad.

The beacon fire rose straight from a headland which jutted for some distance out into the ocean. The beat of the waves against the breakers at the foot of the headland came dimly up to the boys like the stir and rustle of a crowded street.

There had been a fog, but it was lifting now, and here and there traces of green might be seen wherever the flames revealed the surface of the ground. After a time Ben turned back with the *Bertha* and signaled to the others to help in the search for a safe landing-place.

This was by no means an easy task, as it was deep twilight now on the lower stretches of the mountain, and most of the canyons seemed mere yawning pits whose open mouths gaped eagerly for the prey in the air.

The boys turned to north and south in their machines and, sailing low, scrutinized the dim country in the hope of discovering some level spot where the flying machines could be brought to the ground with safety.

At last, perhaps two miles to the south of the

headland, where the beacon light still sent its red flames into the air, Ben came upon a canyon or gully which had evidently once been the bed of a rushing mountain torrent. The wash of water from the steep surfaces, however, had, in distant years, filled the narrow slit between the summits with fine white sand.

It was by no means a large place, but was quite sufficient for the purpose. Ben felt his way carefully down, dropping into what seemed to him to be a fathomless pit between peaks until the white, hard floor below came faintly into view. After examining the place as thoroughly as possible with an electric searchlight, he volplaned down, much to Kit's amazement, and soon had the satisfaction of feeling the rubber-tired wheels beneath the machine running evenly over a smooth surface.

It had been a great risk, however, this dropping down into the darkness between two mountain peaks, and Ben was not certain, even after landing, that he had done the correct thing. His light showed a level surface for only a short distance. The opening of the canyon faced the Pacific. To left and right were almost perpendicular walls. To the east a great crag was worn far under a shelving side by the action of the waves which at some distant time must have forced their way through the split in the mountains.

One thing which troubled the boy not a little was

the question as to whether the space into which he had brought his flying machine was sufficient in size for both the *Bertha* and the *Louise*. They might be packed into the canyon, without doubt, but there was always the matter of room for the flight outward. Still, the place was ideal in that it appeared to be secure from observation from any position except the open sea.

The mountain summits to the north and south seemed entirely inaccessible, while the crag to the east, under which the cave-like excavation showed, looked more like the sharp blade of an upturned knife at the top than a surface capable of being ascended.

Ben waved his light back and forth, indicating to Jimmie and Carl that they should approach the canyon cautiously and from the east. He held an eye of flame to the summit of the crag to show that the drop must not come too suddenly in that direction.

His idea, of course, was to bring the *Louise* in so that her outward flight would be toward the sea. His own machine had come in from the west, and he knew that it would have to be lifted and wheeled about before she could be sent into the air.

Besides offering a comparatively safe hiding-place for the machines, the canyon also seemed to offer protection from the weather for the boys. Ben did not fully investigate the excavations under the crag

at that time, but he knew that the soft lime-rock had been washed away to a considerable extent, and that the face of the cliff was honeycombed with small caves.

Jimmie circled about the canyon for a moment, caught sight of the crag under the flashlight, and passed its sharp edge with only a foot to spare. In a moment more, directed by the light in Ben's hand, he drove the *Louise* along the hard floor until she stood at rest by the side of the *Bertha*.

Jimmie and Carl hastened to make themselves acquainted with the situation in the canyon by means of their electric searchlights. They ran here and there glancing up at the almost vertical walls to the north and south and throwing long fingers of light into the depressions in the crag. By this time Kit was asleep on the sand!

"Looks like one of the East-Side apartment houses," grinned Jimmie, flashing his light upward. "See, there's a row of windows, and there's something that looks like a fire-escape!"

"Your row of windows," laughed Ben, "consists of holes where lime-rocks have been worn away by the action of the water, and your fire-escape is only a long seam in the granite, with frequent cross sections."

"Aw, what's the use of busting up illusions," asked Jimmie. "I was having a pleasan dream of the East Side. And the East Side made me think

of the little old restaurant on Fourteenth street, near Tammany Hall. And the thought of the restaurant reminded me that I hadn't had anything to eat since noon. Why didn't you let me dream?"

"Any old time, it takes Tammany Hall, and Fourteenth street, and a fire-escape on a rock, to make Jimmie remember that he's hungry!" laughed Carl.

"Well, if you're hungry," Ben suggested, "why don't you go on and get supper? You're the cook to-day, anyway."

"Is it safe to build a fire?" asked Carl.

Ben shook his head and pointed to the walls on either side.

"The flame might not be seen," he said, "but the reflection might, so I presume we'd better do our cooking on the alcohol stove."

"Jerusalem!" exclaimed Jimmie. "I don't want any cafeteria, Y. M. C. A., luncheon to-night. I want to get out about a dozen cans of beans, and tinned roast beef, and four or five pounds of ham, and a couple dozen eggs, and have a square meal. We've been sailing over the country for five or six days now eating wind sandwiches and drinking brook water."

"Perhaps," Carl observed pointing to the openings to the east, "we can find a place in there where a fire may safely be built."

"Where's your wood?" asked Ben.

"There's always driftwood in a place like this," Jimmie asserted. "There's always trees falling down from the timber line and rotting in the canyons. I'll find wood, all right, if we can find a place where it's safe to build a fire," he added with a chuckle of delight at the thought of a large meal. "What I need right now is plenty of sustenance!"

"Go to it!" laughed Ben. "Mr. Havens advised us to camp out in some spot about like this, and make excursions over the mountains in search of Phillips and Mendosa, so I don't see why we'll have to move our camp at all. Therefore, a neat little kitchen won't come amiss."

Jimmie started for the cliff with a chuckle. For some minutes his flashlight was seen dodging in and out of the water-worn caverns, and then it disappeared entirely. Carl, who was gathering driftwood, paused at Ben's side and pointed toward the spot where Jimmie's light had last been seen. His face was a trifle anxious as he said:

"You don't suppose he's gone and got into trouble, do you?"

"My guess is that he has found a deep cavern," said Ben.

"I hope so," Carl answered. "Say!" the boy went on, in a moment, "your speaking of Mr. Havens just now reminded me of the fact that he

hasn't communicated with us in any way since we started. I'm getting worried about that man! He might have overtaken us by fast train if he had seen fit to do so, but he didn't."

"I don't see how he could have communicated with us in any way," replied Ben. "We have never left an address, and always his people at the hangar declared in answer to our messages that he had not been heard from since the night he had so mysteriously left the stateroom of the Pullman car. They're getting anxious about him in New York."

"There's one thing," Carl went on, "and that is that the only clue which connects Mendosa and Phillips with the burglary of the Buyers' Bank, and with the murder of the night-watchman, is in the possession of Mr. Havens. We can't do very much until Havens comes."

"We can locate the men, can't we?" asked Ben. "So far as the clue is concerned, that will be needed only at the trial. What the New York chief of police wants is for us to locate the murderers and turn our information over to the California officers."

"Anyway," Carl insisted, "Mr. Havens was carrying a stone and a gold claw broken from a ring believed to have been worn by Mendosa on the night of the murder. The outlaws would go a long

ways in order to secure possession of those articles. I'm getting frightened over Havens' absence."

"Suppose Mendosa should destroy the ring?" asked Ben. "That would render the clue valueless, wouldn't it?"

"Indeed it wouldn't!" answered Carl. "Mendosa is well-known to the police, and that ring was as well known to New York detectives as was the man's face. I understand, too, that there are witnesses who saw Mendosa on the day following the burglary who noticed that one stone had disappeared from the ring, and that a claw had been broken off. Besides," continued Carl, "Mendosa wouldn't destroy that ring, or sell it, or give it away. He would lay it aside in some secure place until he could have the damage repaired. Mendosa is said to be foolish in the head like a fox!"

"You're some detective, I reckon!" laughed Ben. "What you ought to do is to connect with some newspaper reporter and write stories for the magazines. Perhaps you could get one printed!"

"All right," grinned Carl, "you can't figure it out any other way. If the right steps are taken, and the stone and the claw are not stolen from Havens by agents of the outlaws, that ring will eventually convict the murderers of the night-watchman!"

The boys talked for some moments, sitting on the hard, white sand at the side of the machines. They had collected quite a quantity of dry driftwood, and

were now waiting for Jimmie to return from his excursion in search of a safe and convenient cook-room.

"Look here, Ben," Carl said in a moment, "we don't want to go away and leave the machines, not even for a minute, not even if we are in a lonely spot, but some one ought to go and look for Jimmie. You know there's a lot of places a boy might fall into in these mountain caverns!"

"All right," Ben said, rising from the ground, "I'll go and wake Kit. He was so sleepy when I brought the *Bertha* down that I lifted him out of the seat and laid him away against a wall! I don't think he ever knew when I took him off the machine. I'll give him a searchlight and send him to look after Jimmie."

"Where did you put him?" asked Carl, "I'll go and wake him up."

"On a bed of nice hard, white sand close to the south wall," replied Ben. "There's an old coat which I had to wrap around my shouders in the higher altitudes under his head. Bring that along, too; we'll need it later."

Carl went away whistling with his hands in his pockets, taking great breaths of fresh mountain air into his lungs, and believing that he was about the happiest boy on the face of the earth. It was all so different from the crowded streets of New York! In a moment Ben heard him calling.

"You must have mislaid him!" the boy said. "Here's the coat, but the kid isn't here! It looks like there'd been a scrap here on the sand. Perhaps a mountain lion carried him off."

Ben sprang to his feet and rushed out to Carl.

CHAPTER IX.

JUST A CLEVER GAME.

When the old hag glanced cautiously about the disreputable apartment, Havens began to hope that the bribe of twenty thousand dollars which he had offered her might secure his release. It seemed to him that the old woman was strongly tempted to accept the money.

"You can do it easy enough," the young millionaire said, as the woman helped herself to a drink of liquor and restored the bottle to a pocket. "You can get me out of here without danger to yourself, and then you can disappear with the money. No one will ever know."

Havens had been born and reared in New York. Well he knew the law of club and fang which governed the underworld on the East Side. He knew that death follows betrayal as surely as night follows day. He understood that the old woman was taking long chances in even considering his release.

"It ain't enough!" the hag declared in a moment, her vicious eyes showing both greed and ter-

ror. "It ain't enough for a poor old woman like me. I'd have to leave New York forever!"

"I don't doubt it!" Havens replied. "Still," he went on, "judging from appearances, your life here hasn't been one to be much mourned. You haven't had many of the comforts of life," he continued, "and possibly none of its pleasures."

"I'm an old, old woman to leave the East Side," wailed the hag. "Besides," she went on, "how do I know that you would play fair with me? Once out of this place, you'd be likely to hand me over to the police instead of handing the money over to me! I don't think I can trust you!"

"Tell me this," asked Havens, "by whose orders was I brought here?"

The old woman hesitated and then shook her head.

"Tim brought you here," she said in a moment, "and that's all I know about it. He told me to keep you safe and sound."

"Who's Tim?" asked Havens.

"One of the boys," was the indefinite reply.

"What else did he say?" asked Havens.

"Not much!" was the sullen reply. "Nothing at all!"

The hag was becoming more reticent now. She appealed for consolation to her bottle at regular intervals, and finally drew out a black old clay pipe, filled it by poking a scrawny finger into the bowl,

and sat down on the edge of the bunk upon which Havens lay to send the rank fumes of villainous, adulterated tobacco into the already nauseating air of the room.

"How long are they going to keep me?" asked the millionaire.

The hag mumbled over her pipe stem and shook her head silently.

"Now let me give you my last offer," Havens went on. "If you'll get me out of this place without any further inconvenience to myself, I'll go directly to a bank and get you twenty-five thousand dollars! You may go with me if you like, after making yourself presentable."

The old woman hesitated, mumbling over her bottle and her pipe for what seemed to Havens to be a long time. Once or twice he was on the point of asking her if his abduction had been brought about by friends of Phillips and Mendosa.

However, he was uncertain as to the wisdom of this, for he was in doubt as to whether the old woman knew anything concerning the interest which had brought him into his present unpleasant situation, so he remained silent on that point.

He knew very well that if the old woman did not already know that she was serving the interests of the murderers in keeping him there, her terror of punishment for any assistance she might give him would be increased tenfold. For years the Phillips

and Mendosa gang had ruled the East Side, not exactly with a rod of iron, but with revolvers and bung-starters. He knew that the very mention of the gang would bring additional horror to the old woman's mind.

"I believe," the old woman said, in a moment, "that you really would do it, dearie. I really believe you would!"

"I surely would!" replied Havens. "I have many business interests at stake, and might lose much more than twenty-five thousand dollars by remaining in this place, to say nothing of the objectionable features of the apartment. I'll play fair with you, mother."

At the word "mother" the old woman turned her rheumy eyes toward the captive and let them rest upon his face in earnest amazement.

"That's what I'm called here," she said in a moment, "they all call me 'mother' in this place. How did you know?"

"You seemed to me to deserve the title," answered Havens.

No more was said for some moments, then the old woman arose and went to the window, through which the red light still shone from the vessel's mast, and looked out. She shook her head vigorously as she turned back.

"Can you swim?" she said.

"I certainly can," answered Havens.

"And climb up the side of a vessel on a rope?"

"That is an old trick of mine."

"And you can strike a hard blow?" she then asked.

"I am noted among my friends as having the punch," answered Havens with a slight smile.

"Then," said the old woman, "I want you to saw the cords from your wrists over a nail in the wall until they come apart. Then I want you to strike me a knock-out blow on the head, cut the cords on your ankles, make your way through this window, and cross the street to the pier. Then you must drop into the water, softly so as not to attract the attention of the police, and climb a rope leading to the deck of the vessel showing the red light. Do you understand all this?"

"Perfectly!" replied Havens.

"And after you are aboard the vessel," the old woman went on, "you must pretend to have fallen into the water by mistake. You are never to mention being in this apartment at all. When they put you ashore, go on about your business until you receive a note from me. Then we can settle the matter of the money. It will be signed 'Mother DeMott'."

"That's all very well," Havens remarked, sawing away at the cords on his wrists, "but I can't give the blow you ask for, mother."

"If you don't," the old woman insisted, "I shall be murdered before morning!"

"I'll compromise by tying you up," Havens said. "I'll tie you good and tight, and put a handkerchief over your mouth, and they will never suspect."

The young millionaire thought he detected a queer smile on the face of the old lady as he tied the cords with which he had been bound about her withered old wrists and ankles!

The window was not barred or protected in any way, so the sash was easily lifted. It opened to a paved street, the bottom of the sash running on a level with the stones, for the apartment in which he had been confined was a half basement. It was perhaps two o'clock in the morning, and only the skulkers of the night were abroad.

Here and there men slouched by with their chins low down on their breasts and their greasy hats hiding furtive eyes. Now and then a policeman, swinging a heavy night-stick, passed along the street, mumbling imprecations at the waifs who refused to go to bed for the very good reason that they had no beds to go to!

Havens passed out of the window unobserved. He saw a man standing at the entrance to a sailor's boarding house, next door, and there were several moving about at the head of the pier. However, no one seemed to pay any attention to him as he crossed

the street and sat down on the pier with his legs hanging over the side.

While he waited for those nearest to him to go about their business, if they had any to go to, the man standing in the boarding-house door, lit a cigar and waved the still flaming match up and down in the quiet air, as if for the purpose of extinguishing the flame.

At that time Havens thought nothing at all of the incident, but later on he remembered with self-reproach that he ought to have been warned by it.

Presently he dropped into the chill waters of the river and struck out for the boat, not very far away, which displayed the red light from the mast. Not one rope, but a dozen hung from the chains at the prow, and the millionaire had little difficulty in making his way to the deck.

For a moment he saw no one about the vessel, then a bushy head was lifted above a hatchway and a pair of surly eyes turned toward the intruder. Havens stepped forward and spoke.

"Good-evening," he said in his best society manner.

The head was followed out of the hatchway by a short, broad, hulking figure. The face of the man was short and broad like his body. The jaw, which was set like that of a bulldog, was outlined against a rim of red whiskers growing down on his neck.

"What do you want?" the fellow demanded in an angry tone.

"Why," Havens replied, "I was mooning about the pier and fell into the river. I shall want to be set ashore presently."

"You'll go ashore the way you came on board!"

The man flashed ugly eyes at the millionaire. Havens felt the necessity at that time of propitiating the man, for the reason that he wanted to remain hidden on board the vessel until daylight. He believed that a search all through that section would be made for him as soon as his escape had been discovered. He knew, too, that the attempt to pass through that section of the city in the middle of the night would be dangerous to any person having the appearance of wealth.

"Well," Havens said, presently, "I'd like a drink of water, if you have such a thing on board, and I'm willing to pay liberally for your trouble."

"Water cold, eh?" snarled the other.

"Decidedly," answered Havens with a slight shiver.

The man, who appeared to be master of the vessel, which was a small coast-wise trading schooner, walked to the rail and looked out over the street Havens had so recently crossed.

While standing there he took a foul old briar pipe from his pocket, filled it with cut plug tobacco, and touched a match to the ill-smelling heap. Havens

noticed that as he did so he shook the match viciously in the air, as if trying to extinguish the flame.

Again the millionaire was entirely deceived by the apparently innocent action. Feeling comparatively at peace with himself, he stood waiting for the captain's decision.

Presently the squat of a man returned to where the millionaire was standing and pointed toward the hatchway.

"I wouldn't send a cat ashore if he was wet and thirsty," commented the captain. "If you'll step down the hatchway, I'll give you something to offset the chill of the water."

Havens followed the pointing finger, and soon stood in a small cabin which lay completely under the one deck of the schooner. It was a large room, evidently long used for the storage of such goods as the vessel carried, but one corner was partioned off by a screen, and here a faded and worn rug, a broken couch, a table, and a couple of chairs proclaimed the home of the master of the craft. Havens took one of the chairs and waited for his host to speak. A clock on the wall showed the hour of half-past two.

Directly the captain opened a cupboard and brought forth a bottle of spirits and two glasses.

"Help yourself!" he said to Havens.

Now Havens had not the slightest notion of tak-

ing a drink of liquor. He was a total abstainer, and even had he been in the habit of using intoxicating liquors, he would never have indulged under such circumstances. His watch and money had been taken from him before he had regained consciousness, but his general appearance was that of a man who would be apt to pay roundly for his release in case he was temporarily removed from the society of his friends.

However, he poured out a small portion of whiskey and waited for an opportunity to toss it away. The captain of the schooner eyed him maliciously, his undershot jaw set like that of a bulldog.

"So you don't drink, eh?" the captain said, with a snarl.

"You may be mistaken!" answered Havens. "Sometimes I do."

"Mistaken, yourself!" shouted the captain. "You thought you'd bribed Mother DeMott, didn't you? You thought you'd be dropping off the *Nancy* in the morning and turning us all over to the police, didn't you?"

Havens eyed the man for a moment, too dazed to speak.

"In the morning," the captain sneered, "we set sail for South America with one very prominent passenger on board."

CHAPTER X.

A QUEER DISCOVERY.

WHEN Ben reached the place where he had left Kit asleep, Carl stood with a searchlight in his hand, examining footprints on the ground.

"He wandered away, of course!" Carl said.

"He must have done so," was the puzzled reply.

"Because," Carl went on, "there was no one here to lug him off."

"That's the supposition!" replied Ben anxiously.

"But why should the little customer sneak off without saying a word to us?" demanded Carl. "That isn't at all like him!"

"Perhaps he saw Jimmie's light in the cavern and went in there," suggested Ben. "He's an inquisitive little chap."

The boys went to the western extremity of the canyon and looked down an almost perpendicular wall, nearly a thousand feet in height, to the surging waters of the Pacific ocean. They looked up the vertical walls to the summits outlined against

the stars. They threw their lights over the crags at the head of the canyon.

"He's still in here somewhere!" Ben asserted. "I don't believe any one could get out without using a flying machine!"

"Of course, he's here!" Carl answered.

The boys walked closer to the face of the crag and turned their lights on the broken walls.

"It would be just like him to follow Jimmie in there," Carl observed.

"Sure it would!" replied Ben.

"But what gets me," Carl went on, "is that he went away without asking for anything to eat! The kid is second only to Jimmie in the capacity of his stomach. He's always hungry, especially after a short sleep."

"It is a wonder he didn't demand a square meal, as Jimmie calls it, before wandering away," Ben admitted.

"Here's an opening which seems to be the only one Jimmie could enter far enough to shut the light of his electric from the canyon," Carl said, in a moment. "If you'll go back to the machines, I'll go on in and get Jimmie. I may find Kit with him, you know."

"I don't think there's any doubt of it," Ben answered hopefully, at the same moment knowing very well that there might be a good deal of doubt about finding the boy in the cavern.

To tell the truth, Ben at that time felt a premonition of approaching evil which he could by no means resist. It seemed to him impossible that Kit could have wandered out of the canyon.

The only solution of the mystery which came to his mind lay in the recognition of the fact that the canyon had been occupied by some one—perhaps by the murderers themselves—at the moment of his entrance.

He disliked very much to give way to this reasoning, but saw no way out of it. The disappearance of both Jimmie and Kit led him to believe that whoever had occupied the canyon at the time of his arrival—if any one had—had represented a hostile interest.

"Suppose," he proposed to Carl, "that you hurry to the machines while I go into the cavern. Or you might, if you see fit, pass in a short distance with me and stand where you can watch the machines, and at the same time follow my course into the underground passage."

"That's the idea!" cried Carl.

Ten feet in the passage turned abruptly to the north and there the boys drew up. Ben pointed straight ahead.

"There's a light!" he said.

Carl glanced eagerly in the direction indicated but saw nothing.

"A ghost light!" he laughed.

"No, but there is an illumination!" insisted Ben.

"Point it out, then," chuckled Carl. "It is as dark in there as a stack of black cats!"

Ben looked amazed for an instant and then started forward.

"I did see a light!" he insisted.

Carl laughed and stood at the angle of the passage where he could see the machines, lighted by one small acetylene lamp, and also follow the progress of his chum into the interior.

"Perhaps you did see a light," he called after the boy, "but if you did it got out of sight handily.

Directly Ben turned in the passage and waved his light to attract Carl's attention.

"There's another turn here," he said.

"Shall I come on in?" asked Carl.

"Watch the machines!" was the answer that came back.

Still standing where he could see any light or hear any noise proceeding from the cavern, Carl kept his eyes fixed on the machines, rather dimly outlined by the rays of the single lamp.

He had remained in this position only a short time when a cry of alarm came from the passage down which Ben had proceeded.

Swinging his light and answering the call by a shrill whistle, the boy rushed forward.

At the turning point he saw Ben, Jimmie and Kit

standing huddled about a figure lying on the stone floor of the cavern.

Seeing his light, they beckoned him to approach.

"You see," Jimmie said with a chuckle as Carl came up, "that we can't visit any part of the world, in the air or underground, that doesn't yield an adventure. Look what I found here!"

"What is it?" asked Carl, bending forward.

"Chinaman!" was the short answer.

The boys stood looking into each other's faces with wondering glances for a moment, and then Ben bent closer over the figure lying on the stone floor.

"He's still alive!" he said, in a moment.

"And tied up like a chicken!" Jimmie added, pointing to the cords which bound the Chinaman's wrists and ankles.

"Any old time we don't go and find some one tied up!" Carl laughed.

"Where did you find him, Jimmie?" asked Carl.

"Wait a moment, boys!" Ben advised. "We'd better get back to the machines before listening to any long stories."

"And I was just thinking," Jimmie cut in, "that I haven't had any supper! I'm just about starved to death!"

"Perhaps that's what's the matter with the Chinaman," observed Carl.

"Anyway, we'd better carry him out to the ma-

chines and see how he acts when presented with a square meal," advised Ben.

"That's all right!" Jimmie declared. "It's all right to rescue the perishing, and all that, but if some forest ranger should come along here and find us mixed up with a Chinaman, we'd all be pinched!"

"Do they smuggle on this coast?" asked Carl.

"Of course they do!" replied Jimmie scornfully.

"Smuggle what?"

"Chinks and opium!"

"Then I see myself owning the Night and Day bank when I get back to New York!" Carl exclaimed. "There's a government reward for the capture of men who run in Chinks and smuggle opium!"

"Well, we may as well be getting back to the machines," urged Ben. "I'll run on ahead and see if they're all right, and you boys may bring the Chinaman along if you think best."

"We'll bring him along all right!" Jimmie answered. "We can't leave him lying here unconscious."

Ben found that the machines had not been molested, and in a short time his chums returned carrying the light form of the Chinaman with them.

The Celestial had regained consciousness and sat

gazing about with inquisitive eyes as soon as placed on the ground.

"Who trussed you up?" asked Jimmie.

The Chinaman shook his head until his queue rattled about like a rope's end in the wind.

"He can't talk United States," Carl explained.

"What are we going to do with him?" asked Jimmie.

"Keep him to do our laundry work!" chuckled Kit.

"What do you know about laundry work?" asked Ben turning to the boy.

"I used to work in the laundry," returned Kit. "I had to do all the hard work and the big fat girls got all the money."

"Are you going to build a fire in that Devil's Kitchen we discovered?" asked Ben of Jimmie, as the boy began bringing out provisions.

"I should say not!"

"Then we can't have any square meals!" Carl exclaimed.

"What did you see in there?" asked Ben.

"When I first went in," Jimmie explained, "I got a whiff which made me think of Pell street, in little old New York. It was opium, all right, and I began to understand what I'd stumbled into."

"Could you see a light?" asked Ben.

"No light! There was only the smell and a

jabber which sounded to me like the chin-chin in the back room of a laundry on Doyers street.

"Then there are more Chinamen in there?" exclaimed Ben.

"There were more in there!" replied Jimmie.

"Where did they go?" asked Carl.

Kit sat back against Ben's leg and let out a roar of laughter which for a moment prevented the question being answered.

"Ask Kit!" Jimmie suggested.

"If you leave it to me," Kit went on, still half choking with laughter, "they slid into the ragged little slashes between the rocks! One minute they were scampering along in their soft slippers, and the next they were out of sight just like they had gone up in smoke."

"I guess we've struck it!" Jimmie said in a moment.

"Don't we always strike it?" asked Carl.

"You bet we do!" returned Jimmie. "But we never struck a nest of Chinks before! What do you suppose they're doing here, anyway?"

"Waiting to get into Frisco," answered Ben. "They pay from four to eight hundred dollars apiece for being smuggled into the country."

Jimmie sprang to his feet, almost overturning a can of tomatoes from which he had been feeding.

"But how did they get here?" insisted Carl.

"I know!" cried Jimmie all excitement. "I know all about it?"

"Wise little boy!" laughed Ben.

"Now you just hold on!" Jimmie continued. "You just wait until I unload a little of Solomon's wisdom on you boys."

"Go ahead," grinned Ben.

"You remember the light we saw when we came to the coast line?" Jimmie demanded.

"Of course," answered Carl.

"Well," Jimmie went on, "that beacon was put there for the purpose of directing some schooner loaded with Chinks to this place. Now what do you think of us stumbling right into a mess like that?"

"I guess that's right," mused Ben. "The fire was built on a headland to direct smugglers in. Now, I wonder why we didn't think of that before and get farther away?"

"But we are at least two miles away from the headland!" suggested Carl.

"Of course," Ben returned, "for there is no cove where a vessel might cast anchor along this rocky wall. The Chinks are undoubtedly unloaded near the headland where we saw the fire and brought here to be kept until they can be set into the country."

"That's all right!" exclaimed Jimmie. "That's

all right, so far as it goes, but what about our finding this fellow all tied up?"

"That's a thing no fellow can find out!" grinned Carl.

"When I followed Jimmie into the cave," Kit replied, "there wasn't no Chinaman lying where this fellow was found."

"We can't solve the mystery if we talk here all night," Ben observed, directly, "so we'd better get our suppers and make up our minds what we're going to do through the night."

"I want to sleep!" cried Jimmie and this sentiment was echoed by all the others.

"This is a nice, quiet place to sleep," Ben said, in a sarcastic tone, "especially," he added, "as there's another beacon fire burning not far south of us. If you look closely, you'll see its reflection lighting up the north wall of the canyon!"

CHAPTER XI.

A DANGEROUS GAME.

"I'LL tell you my idea of the situation in about one minute!" Jimmie broke in. "If you follow my advice, you'll get into the aeroplanes and get away from this old smuggler's den. I want to get somewhere where I can lay down and sleep, and get up and eat, and go back and sleep, and get up and eat again, without being interrupted!"

"Does the young man express the sentiments of the meeting?" asked Carl with a laugh.

"He expresses mine!" answered Kit.

"And mine, too," replied Ben, "only——"

"Only, what?" demanded Jimmie.

"Only it strikes me," Ben continued, "that we've stumbled on a streak of luck."

"I don't see how!" Jimmie argued.

"Look here," explained Ben, "if Phillips and Mendoza are in this vicinity they are familiar with the stir of outlaw life about this place. It is quite probable that they know exactly what is going on, and it is also quite probable that they have not made their presence here known to the smugglers."

"Do you get the idea?" asked Carl turning to Jimmie. "I'll tell you right now that I don't."

"So, you see," Ben went on with a tolerant smile, "the outlaws will credit any rumpus that takes place here to the smugglers."

"That's all right, so far as we're concerned," replied Jimmie, "but what will the smugglers say to our nesting down here and cuddling up to them?"

"I can answer that question!" Carl cut in. "The first time we leave camp they'll smash our machines and consume our provisions!"

"I'm not so sure about that," Ben mused. "I have an idea that they'll just naturally get their imported Chinamen out of the way and abandon the camp!"

"That beacon fire to the south may be shouting a warning to the skies right now!" Jimmie exclaimed. "They may be sending a mob up here, right now, to steal our machines and give us decent burial."

"I wish Mr. Havens could drop out of the sky just about now!" suggested Carl. "Perhaps he could tell us what we ought to do."

"I think I know what we ought to do now," Ben interrupted. "We ought to go down to the end of the canyon and see if there are any steamers gathering about that beacon light. We wouldn't exactly like to have a mob of cutthroats rushing in here with another cargo of Chinks."

"That's a fact!" Carl agreed. "We ought to be finding out what that beacon means!"

The boys walked down to the end of the canyon and looked almost straight below into the tumbling surf of the Pacific ocean. The second beacon was on a headland a little more than a quarter of a mile to the south.

Its flames leaped high in the comparatively still air, and a wide area of mountain and sea was disclosed. Standing out a short distance, pitching heavily in the swell of the ocean, lay two coast steamers of fair size.

"There they are!" Carl exclaimed. "Just watch, and you'll see boats loaded with Chinks making their way to some cove in the coast not far distant."

"Well, what are we going to do?" asked Ben.

"We just can't stay here!" shouted Carl.

"Of course not!" Jimmie added.

"What about it, Kit?" Ben asked, turning to the boy with a laugh.

"I don't care where you take me, so long as there's something to eat there!" the lad answered.

After a long consultation, it was decided to take the machines out of the canyon that night. The boys knew that in time the unlawful acts of the smugglers would bring them to punishment. Their arrest might take place within one day, or within one year, but, whenever it was, the lads decided

that they could not afford to be in any way implicated by knowledge of the smuggling, or by being in a position to be suspected of knowing more than they really did.

After a hastily-eaten supper, the boys ran the *Bertha* around so as to face the sea and stowed on board of her the packages of provisions which had been removed and opened.

This done, Ben ran both machines back to the crag and paced the distance to the abrupt drop into the sea.

"How far is it?" asked Jimmie.

"Something less than a hundred paces!" was the reply.

"The machines will rise in that distance, all right!" Carl cut in.

"If they do, it's all right," Ben answered, "and if they don't, we'll all be dumped into the Pacific ocean.

"Well," chuckled Jimmie, "we came clear across the continent to get to the Pacific ocean, didn't we?"

"Couldn't we swim out?" asked Kit innocently.

"Probably," grinned Carl, "with a surf washing twenty feet up on the rocks! Why," he continued, "there wouldn't be enough of us left in a minute to wad a gun."

"The *Louise* will make it all right!" Jimmie in-

sisted. "I've pulled her into the air in less than two hundred feet!"

"The *Bertha* can make anything the *Louise* can," Ben answered rather impatiently. "I'll go first with Kit and see what the prospects are," he continued. "If I'm not killed, you can follow."

Kit shivered as he stepped into the seat.

"I wish right now," he grumbled, "that I was asleep in Robinson's barn."

"Steady now, hold her right!" Jimmie called out, as Ben pressed the starter and the wheels under the aeroplane began to revolve. "Hold her tight and steady, and push on the bottom of the seat when you get over the ocean. If you drop, whistle!"

"Cut it out, you little idiot!" stormed Carl. "That's no fool of a trick Ben's trying to do! The air massed before and under the machine as it moves along over the ground will push over the precipice, and then the aeroplane will shoot downward, no matter if the wheels do leave the surface before she comes to the edge."

"That will be all right, if she comes up again!" Jimmie grinned.

"Perhaps you wouldn't feel so merry over the proposition if you were going in the first machine," Carl said, impatiently.

"Huh!" grunted Jimmie with an exasperating smile, "we've got to go over the precipice, too, haven't we?"

The *Bertha* wheeled slowly and steadily down the slight incline toward the line of demarcation between the white sand and the open air, the Pacific pounding upon the rocks a thousand feet below. Watching the flying machine at the critical moment, Jimmie's red hair almost lifted his cap from his head as the great planes swept for a moment below the level of the canyon floor.

The planes rose again in a second, however, and lifted almost instantly into the red light of the beacon fire gleaming from the headland below. It seemed to the anxious boys that she must drop down again, but, instead, the planes lifted higher and higher until she sailed like a bird out of the limited circle of illumination.

"Now for it, Carl!" shouted Jimmie, and together they sprang to their seats and started the *Louise*.

Notwithstanding the fact that the *Bertha* had made the trip into the air in safety, the young aviators felt shivers navigating their backs as they dropped down at the edge of the precipice.

For an instant it seemed as if the motors would never lift the planes in time to prevent a tumble into the ocean, but at last the *Louise* leaped upward and onward, past the light of the signal fire, and into the semi-darkness which lay over the scenery.

By this time Ben was some distance away with the *Bertha*. Jimmie turned the *Louise* in his direc-

tion and the two flying machines were soon side by side. For a moment the boys tried to converse together, but the clatter of the motors and the rush of air prevented the spoken words from reaching the ears of the others.

Failing to communicate to Jimmie and Carl the thing which was on his mind, Ben lifted a hand and quickly pointed to the north.

The headland in that direction still flamed red with the signal which had been observed at twilight.

Although the distance was nearly two miles, the boys saw that people were moving about the fire. Straight west from the headland a second schooner lay rocking on the pulse of the waves.

"It's a wonder the government wouldn't send gunboats down here!" shouted Jimmie in his chum's ear. "It's bananas to beams that both those steamers are carrying contraband goods in the shape of Chinks and opium."

"They can carry anything they like, so long as they let us alone!" Carl answered back.

For, a time both machines passed straight out to the west, rising slightly as they advanced. Then Ben turned away to the south, evidently with the intention of passing above the deck of the steamer which lay in front of the second beacon.

Jimmie, of course, followed his example, and directly both flying machines dipped down to within

a hundred yards of the deck. There was no longer any doubt concerning the mission of the vessel. At least a score of Chinamen were in sight.

The appearance of the flying machines naturally created great excitement on the deck below. Hairy-faced sailors shook their fists violently upward, and the Chinamen were driven like cattle into a hatchway and passed out of sight.

"We haven't got a line on the bank burglars yet!" Jimmie shouted into Carl's ear, "but we've butted in on a mighty prosperous game just the same!"

Ben, of course, was beyond the reach of his chum's voice, but he expressed his acknowledgment of the situation by turning in his seat and waving an arm in the direction of the *Louise*.

As soon as the two aeroplanes passed beyond the beacon on the headland, they turned to the sea again and moved out some distance from the shore. It was the intention, of course, to pass down the coast in quest of another landing-place, and they swung out to sea in order that their movements might not be observed in case they were watched from the mountain.

Perhaps three miles from the second beacon and schooner they turned sharply to the east and lifted to an altitude sufficient to enable them to cross the line of summits which guarded the coast.

They proceeded in this direction for a short time

passing over what seemed to them to be the highest peak of the Sierra de Santa Lucia, and then dropped down into what appeared, in the dim light of the stars, to be a round bowl of a valley between two parallel ridges.

It was desperate and creepy work, settling down to earth, but the usual luck of the boys prevailed, and before long they found themselves in a grassy valley some two thousand feet below the summit. They all shivered as they stepped out of their seats and gathered in a group.

"What did you see when you crossed the summit?" asked Ben, turning to Jimmie. "Anything particular attract your attention?"

"To tell you the truth," the boy replied, "I was so frightened, and so busy following your lead, that I saw only the neck-breaking places below and the stars above."

"Well," Ben went on, "if you had taken a good look to the north, you would have seen a flying machine hovering over the headland where we saw the first signal."

"A flying machine?" repeated Carl.

"That's what I said!" insisted Ben.

"And that means," Jimmie argued, "that the blond brute who tried to blow up our aeroplanes not far from St. Louis reached the ocean about the time of our arrival."

"That's the way it looks to me," Ben agreed.

"Have you any idea he saw us?" asked Carl.

"I've been thinking about that," Ben answered, "and I can't quite make up my mind. You see," he went on, "it's just this way: If he crossed the range while our machines were reflecting the light of the lower beacon, he undoubtedly saw us. If he crossed after we passed out to sea and turned back to the east, he probably doesn't know that we're here."

"He'll find out quick enough!" suggested Carl.

"How?" asked Jimmie.

"Why, the fellows who were sneaking the Chinamen across the Mexican border will tell him all right!" was the answer.

"Don't you ever think they'll tell him," Ben broke in. "He won't give them a chance to tell him anything! He'll dodge them as if they had the small-pox."

"That's about right," Jimmie agreed. "He'll head straight for Phillips and Mendosa and tell them that there's a red-headed boy who will cross their life-lines in about twenty-four hours!"

"I hope he doesn't know where to find them!" Ben observed.

"He probably does," Ben suggested.

"Say," cried Jimmie dancing about on his toes, "I don't believe he knows where they are any more than we do—nor half so much.

"What's the answer?" asked Ben.

"Do you remember the note Kit found in the barn where that monkey-faced aviator had his arm set?" asked Jimmie.

"That's a fact!" exclaimed Ben. "Who's got the note now?"

"I have!" shouted Jimmie. "I have it at this moment secreted about my person, but it isn't necessary for me to read it again to tell what it says. It gives an address and the address is Two Sisters canyon."

"This blond cruiser may have a copy of it," suggested Carl.

"Of course, he may," returned Jimmie, "but I don't believe it. This monkey-faced fellow seems to me to be the big squeeze in this game, and thieves don't trust each other a little bit."

While the boys talked, the aeroplane which had been observed in the light of the north beacon came sailing over the summit to the west and dipped down toward the surface only a short distance away from where the boys were sitting.

"There!" Ben observed, "he either saw and followed us, or he knows where Two Sisters canyon is and is heading for it."

"As the Bureau of Forecasts would say," chuckled Jimmie, "threatening weather may be expected about this time."

"It looks to me like I never would get any more sleep!" wailed Kit.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIGHT IN THE CABIN.

"It strikes me," Havens observed, as he sat at the little table in the screened-off corner of the *Nancy's* cabin, gazing at the brutal features of Captain DeMott, the son of the old hag who had so deceived him. "It strikes me," he repeated, "that you people have some strong motive for getting me out of the way."

"Sartin, sure," answered Captain DeMott.

"I must give you credit for capable management," Havens went on, with a smile. "How did you ever get me out of the stateroom?"

DeMott chuckled, shaking his broad shoulders, but did not answer the question. Then his wicked face hardened.

"Fishing for millionaires in New York," he commented, "is about the surest and safest sport a-going at this time."

The old fellow poured himself a liberal portion of whiskey from the bottle and drank it greedily, smacking his lips heartily.

"We had trouble getting you to the house," he finally said, "and were afraid to carry you from there on board the *Nancy*. So the old woman says to me that if we would leave you to her care for a short time, she'd send you into the cabin of this here vessel of your own accord."

"Very cleverly done!" commented Havens.

The man took another drink out of the bottle and refilled his foul briar pipe. Havens sat in a brown study during the latter operation. Captain DeMott seemed to be the only person besides himself on board the boat, and he was wondering if it would be possible to overcome the fellow and secure his freedom.

Once out of the boat and into the river, he would be safe from pursuit, for a police barge would undoubtedly spring into motion at the splash.

Desperate as the situation was, the young millionaire decided that he ought at least to make the attempt.

Presently DeMott, probably entering upon a small celebration in honor of an adventure so craftily carried out, stepped to the cupboard and brought forth another bottle of liquor.

"You needn't mind inspecting the fastenings of the hatch or the windows," leered the captain as he seated himself again. "I saw you doing of it while I was at the cupboard, so I'll tell you for your own information that the hatch is locked down

hard and fast, and that the windows are likewise fastened."

Havens smiled grimly but made no reply.

"Likewise," continued the captain, his voice growing slightly unsteady, "I hold in these here pockets of mine two automatic revolvers which I have a habit of using in case anything unpleasant turns up."

"I presume," Havens said after a time, "that the offer I made to Mother DeMott would be rejected by you."

"I haven't seen Mother DeMott," was the answer.

"I offered her twenty-five thousand dollars," said Havens.

"That is a tidy sum, too," the captain mumbled. "And yet," he went on, "what would twenty-five thousand bucks amount to if one got a knife in his back for the taking of 'em?"

"You seem to be connected with a cheerful sort of a gang," Havens suggested. "I don't think I'd like such associates."

"It's a gang that meets treachery with cold steel!" said the captain savagely. "Always cold steel for traitors!"

"I've heard," Havens observed in a moment, "that Phillips and Mendoza regard human life very lightly."

Captain DeMott sprang to his feet with an oath.

"I said nothing about Phillips and Mendoza," he shouted, shaking his fist in the millionaire's face. "I never saw either one of them!"

Notwithstanding the emphatic denial of the captain, Havens knew then where to look for accessories after the fact in the case of the two murderers. There was no longer any doubt as to the interest which had connived at his abduction.

The clock on the cabin wall denoted the hour of three, and Havens knew that whatever was done must be done at once.

With the morning others would undoubtedly make their appearance on board the *Nancy*, and then escape would be practically impossible. The captain sat at the table for some moments, now, in gloomy silence, occasionally lifting a pair of bloodshot eyes to the face of his captive. At last, however, the millionaire's opportunity came.

DeMott, swinging sullenly about in his swivel chair, brought his broad back against the edge of the table, on the other side of which Havens sat.

Havens lifted suddenly in his chair, seized the brawny neck with both muscular hands and drew the fellow back upon the table. The furniture was old and creaky, but it held under the added weight. DeMott naturally threw his great hands to his throat to remove the pressure which was shutting the air out of his lungs, but Havens held fast.

The man struggled fiercely, desperately, but the

nervous fingers never left his throat. Finally the captain managed to throw himself to the floor, and then he almost succeeded in gripping the throat of his opponent. But Havens was an athlete, and an expert at the wrestling game, so the fellow's effort failed of success.

After what seemed to the millionaire to be an infinite number of hours, DeMott lay unconscious on the cabin floor. Possessing himself of one of the fallen man's automatic revolvers, Havens looked about for the key to the cabin hatch. It was not in the captain's pocket, but he found it in a drawer of the desk.

When he opened the hatch there was a pearly light in the east, and already the river was astir with moving craft. After a moment's thought, he got softly into the water and moved toward the pier. He heard a shout and saw a police boat moving toward him.

Uttering a cry for assistance, he remained stationary until he was picked up by the guardians of the river. Very fortunately the man in charge of the squad was an intelligent and observing officer of long experience in river work. He knew the shady reputation of the *Nancy,* and remembered, also, that her captain was in great demand at Sing Sing, from which place he had taken his departure without the formality of a permit. This being the case, Havens had little difficulty in explaining the

situation. He was permitted to depart after disclosing his identity.

When he turned back to the pier and looked at the Nancy in the growing light of day, he saw half a dozen blue-coated officials swarming over the sides. Shivering from his bath in the river, faint from the excitement and exertion of the night, the millionaire waited at the head of the pier on the chance of seeing a taxicab.

None appeared, however, and he was obliged to walk some distance before seeing one of the night-hawks which prowl the streets of New York between midnight and morning. Without stopping a moment for refreshment, he ordered the chauffeur to drive with all speed to his city garage. His own chauffeur was awakened with difficulty, but finally the journey to the hangar in Westchester county was fairly begun.

In five minutes after the arrival of the master the whole place was illuminated and a dozen men were at work.

"Look here, Hilton," Havens said to the night-watchman, "I want the *Ann* put in shape for a long journey, and I want the trick turned in less than an hour. I want provisions and gasoline sufficient for two days, and I don't want a word spoken concerning the departure of the flying machine. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," answered Hilton.

"If any of the people ask about the departure of the *Ann*," the millionaire went on, "tell them that she has gone out on a trial trip. They will presume, of course, that she was taken out by an aviator."

"Yes, sir," replied Hilton.

"And, another thing," commanded Havens, "if any telegrams arrive here for me, the reply is to be made that I took a sleeper for the west last night. It may be also said if the messages are pressing that I unaccountably left the sleeper before the departure of the train, and since that time have not been seen."

"You expect telegrams, sir?" asked Hilton.

"There may be several," answered the millionaire.

In an hour, as per orders, the *Ann* was ready for flight, fully provisioned for a long voyage and with tanks well loaded with gasoline. After giving Hilton positive instructions to inform his secretary that all inquiries should be answered as stated above, Havens stepped into the seat and whirled away.

At that hour, it will be remembered, the boys were watching their machines in the open field a short distance east of the Mississippi river. All that day, while the lads waited in and about the St. Louis post-office, telegraphing to the hangar at frequent intervals, the millionaire was speeding swiftly in their direction. At the Forest Park

hangar Havens secured his first news of the boys.

However, the superintendent knew nothing whatever of the destination of the *Louise* and the *Bertha*. The boys, he reported, had been non-communicative. The millionaire, however, was glad to learn that the lads had proceeded thus far on their way without serious accident. After filling his tanks and taking a short rest at one of the leading hotels, Havens continued his way.

As will be seen by the reader, he was only a short distance in the rear of the *Louise* and the *Bertha*. The *Ann* was a much more powerful machine than either of the ones owned by the boys, and Havens was noted for his reckless driving, so it is quite possible that he would have caught a glimpse of the two flying machines at some stage of the journey if the latter had kept farther to the north as had been agreed upon.

As Havens swept rapidly over the country he was more than satisfied with the steps he had taken to prevent pursuit. But he was out of touch with the boys as well as with his business associates! He still considered the situation a desirable one for the reason that he was also out of touch with the mercenaries who had given him such a bad night on the water front!

And so, flying swiftly, stopping only to rest for a few hours at time, and for gasoline and provis-

ions. Havens crossed the continent in his powerful machine, and, one morning, caught sight of the pretty little city of Monterey, nestling on the border of the bay of the same name. His next task would be to locate the *Louise* and the *Bertha*.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN RANGER UNIFORM.

"SPEAKING about sleep," Ben observed, as Kit made the remark that he never expected to get any more, "reminds me that we can't go on like this forever. It will soon be daylight, now, and the chances are that the fellow in the other flying machine will lie low for a time for the same reason that we shall. In other words, he won't want to attract undue attention by hovering over the mountains in plain sight of forest rangers and tourists."

"That's a mighty pleasant conclusion!" laughed Jimmie. "It means that all we've got to do now is to leave one man to guard the machines and sleep all day!"

"I'll do the watching stunt," offered Kit. "I had a great sleep back there in the other canyon."

"You might have had a longer one if you hadn't followed Jimmie into the cavern," suggested Carl.

"Well," replied Kit, "you fellows made so much noise that I couldn't sleep, and I saw Jimmie's light

disappearing in the cave, and so I just naturally sneaked in after him! I got there just in time, too," he went on, " for I believe those Chinks would have devoured Jimmie if they hadn't seen some one else coming!"

" Speaking of Chinks," laughed Carl, " I wonder what that Chink thought when he saw us heading our machines directly for the precipice."

" It's a good bet that he didn't stop long enough to think," Ben suggested. " The chances are that he flew back to his companions in the cave at a pace that set his pigtail straight out in the air."

" You found him tied up, didn't you?" asked Ben.

" We sure did," replied Kit.

" Then why should he go back to the people who served him a trick like that?" asked Ben.

" That's a fact," Jimmie replied, " I never thought of that."

" Now, I'd give a dollar to know what they were doing to him, anyway," Carl put in. " I can't understand why they should tie up one of their own crowd in that way."

" He was a queer-looking fellow," suggested Kit.

" Just washee-washee!" Jimmie insisted.

" Well," Kit went on, " when I held the light in his face and bent down over him, it seemed to me that he drew a grin that meant something more

than amazement. And, then, did you notice how he chuckled when we turned him loose?"

"I only noticed that he smelled like a Chinese laundry!" Jimmie answered. "I never did like a Chink."

"Now, if we sit around here talking all day, we won't any of us get any sleep," Carl exclaimed, after a while. "We'll give Jimmie a chance to get up one of his square meals, and then all flop in this nice soft grass and wake up when we hear the sun going down."

"That'll suit me!" Kit said. "I wouldn't sleep if I had a chance! You fellows go to it, and I'll watch the machines."

The breakfast was not so elaborate as the boys desired, but there was plenty of it, and in a short time the three were stretched out on the grass sound asleep, their faces protected by a rude awning hastily constructed out of a shelter tent.

Kit wandered about the little valley aimlessly for a long time. The whole situation was new to him, and he was filled with wonder at the things he had seen since leaving the little settlement where the boys had found him.

The valley where the flying machines had landed has been called a little bowl between two parallel ridges. The word bowl describes it exactly.

It was as round as if dug out by the hand of man. The bottom was covered with lush grass, and

through the center a small stream trickled from ridge to ridge. Where the rivulet started and where it ended no one knew. For years the valley had been known as the Place of the Lost Brook.

The sides were heavily timbered to the very summits which shut in the bowl. Through some freak of nature, however, there was no undergrowth or trees at the very bottom. Perhaps the soil, being a wash from the rocks around in prehistoric days, provided only sufficient nourishment for the grass which grew there.

After walking around the grassy bowl, and crossing the stream at least a dozen times, Kit turned his face toward the wooded slope to the west. He was soon in the heart of a forest, the trees of which interlaced their boughs far above his head. The sun shone warmly on the softly swaying tops, and there was a stir of insect life in the air. He knew that the summit of the ridge he was climbing was merely a convex wrinkle in the side of the lofty mountains.

His idea as he climbed steadily upward, always keeping his eye on the little valley where the machines lay, was to reach the top and look into the next canyon in the hope of seeing the flying machine which had been observed during the dark hours of the night. Wearied from his long climb, he finally sat down and leaned against the bole of a sprawling sycamore tree.

Birds were winging their way among the branches of the trees, and the drone of insect life was in his ears. In fact, the boy would have been asleep in another moment if an unexpected thing had not occurred.

The bushes directly in front of him parted, and, with a grunt like that of an overfed hog, a gigantic grizzly bear lumbered into the little clearing under the boughs of the tree.

Kit had never seen a grizzly bear before. In fact, his knowledge concerning all wild animals was limited. At that moment, however, instinct told him that the bear was not friendly to his species.

At first it seemed that the animal was equally surprised with the boy, for he drew hastily back, his pig-like eyes glaring viciously.

The fellow was evidently not very hungry, but at the same time he did not propose to overlook a feast of boy. The next thing Kit saw was a figure advancing toward him on a pair of hind legs which seemed to him to be larger than the trunk of the tree against which he leaned.

With a shout which he now declares must have been heard in San Francisco, he sprang for an overhanging limb and drew himself up. A person less agile and, perhaps, less frightened, would have been unable to escape the sweep of the bear's paw which followed his spring.

The bough bent low under the weight of the boy,

but he seized another just above it, and in a short time was walking up the tree like one passing from one rung of a ladder to another. Bruin sat down under the sheltering branches, evidently intending to remain there until his dinner should be served. Kit looked down upon him scornfully.

"Come on up, bear!" he shouted.

Bruin growled out a refusal.

"Look here, bear," Kit explained, talking to the animal as if he understood every word that was said, "you ought to go on your way immediately, for I have two flying machines to watch, and consequently have no time to visit with you. Go on away, now!"

Bruin uttered a series of vicious growls at the sound of the boy's voice, but refused to honor the request.

"I'm in a nice box, now!" wailed Kit. "If I only had a gun, I could fill this wild animal full of lead, but I haven't got any gun, and I guess I've got to stay here until some of the boys wake up and come to the rescue. I'm in a bad fix!"

The bear did not seem to agree with the boy in his estimate of the situation, for he appeared to be contented as he shambled around under the tree, looking up into the branches with greedy eyes.

"Now," thought Kit after the situation had held for at least half an hour, "I wonder how I'm going to shake this brute. If I let out a yell, people we

don't want to know anything about our presence here may follow the sound of my voice and make trouble with the machines before the boys get up."

An hour passed and the bear showed no signs of impatience.

"If I had a good round rock about the size of a hen's egg," declared Kit, "I believe I could raise a welt on his nose that would put him on a fluid diet for a month! But I haven't got any rock, and I haven't got any gun," wailed the boy. "All I've got left is my voice, and I'm going to use that right now!"

In accordance with this decision, Kit threw back his chest and let out a shout which, as he believed, must have been heard far beyond the camp. Indeed it was heard at a point more distant than the place where the machines were standing. The boy listened in suspense for an answer to his call, and was soon gratified to see a motion in the undergrowth to the right.

"Hello!" a voice cried in a moment.

"Look out!" Kit answered. "There's about a ton of bear under this tree! He's waiting for his dinner!"

Bruin sniffed in the direction of the new-comer, but continued to give the most of his attention to the tree and the boy it held.

"Why don't you shoot him?"

"Got no gun!"

"Jump down and run, then," suggested the other.

"Not me!" replied Kit.

Almost before the words were out of his mouth, the whizz of a bullet cut the air, and the bear dropped, floundering and gasping, to the ground.

"You can come down now!" said the stranger.

"Holy Smoke!" shouted Kit. "How did you shoot that bear without firing a gun? Is he really dead?"

"He's as dead as he ever will be!" was the reply.

"Did you throw something at him?" asked Kit, still wondering.

The boy heard a chuckle in the bushes but saw no one.

"I have a silencer on my gun," the voice said directly. "I don't care to advertise every bullet I send out."

The boy dropped down from the tree and stood for a moment over the bear, still twitching spasmodically, but undoubtedly dead.

Then a man in the uniform of a forest ranger stepped out and looked the boy over curiously.

"You're a little mite of a fellow to be in a mix-up like this," the ranger said. "Where are your friends?"

"Down in the valley," replied the boy. "We came across in flying machines and we're taking a little rest."

"Rather a dangerous locality to take a little rest in," smiled the other. "You ought not to remain here long."

"Why don't you go down and talk to the boys?" asked Kit. "I left them asleep by the machines."

"Well," the visitor said, after a moment's hesitation, "I may give you a call this evening, if you are still in the valley. Just now I have an important engagement."

"We'll be glad to see you," replied Kit.

"So you came over in flying machines, did you?" asked the man in ranger's uniform.

"That's what we did," replied the boy.

"What do you call the machines?" asked the other.

"The *Lower* and the *Perris*."

"From New York, eh?"

"Yes, from New York," replied the unsuspecting boy.

"Well," said the man after a moment's thought, "I'll probably call on your friends to-night. I never fail to have a good time in the company of flying machine boys. By the way," he added as he turned away, "have you seen anything of a third machine in this vicinity?"

As the man spoke he lifted his left hand to brush a twig out of his path and Kit saw that the little finger was missing at the first joint.

"No," the boy replied in a moment, making a mental note of the crippled hand. "I don't think there's any other machine here."

For the first time during that interview the boy realized that he had been talking too much. Therefore, he denied any knowledge of the aeroplane which had crossed the mountains during the night.

The Ranger departed, and Kit hastened to the camp to find the boys awake and anxious concerning his absence. Of course he was all excitement over the encounter with the bear, but he told of his conversation with the ranger hesitatingly, for he disliked to admit that he had been too talkative with an entire stranger. He explained the good turn the ranger had served him and added that they might have company that night.

"Forest ranger, is he?" asked Ben as the boy concluded his story.

"He wore a ranger's uniform, anyway!" replied Kit.

"And he asked you all about us, didn't he?" Jimmie quizzed.

"Why, he asked a few questions, yes."

"And you told him all about our coming from New York, and the names of our machines, and everything else you could think of, didn't you?" questioned Carl. "You were so glad he saved your life that you told him all you knew?"

"I told him about New York, and about the machines," was the hesitating reply. "He didn't seem to care much about details."

"What sort of a looking man is he?" asked Ben.

"Oh, he looks all right," Kit replied. "I couldn't describe him. When he lifted his left hand I saw that the little finger was off at the first joint. That's all I know about him."

"That's enough!" Ben exclaimed. "We don't have to know any more about him! Phillips has a frank, pleasant manner, and his little finger on the left hand is off at the first joint, too, but perhaps that is only a coincidence!" he added with a scornful smile.

Kit actually turned pale under all his freckles.

"Is that one of the men you boys have been telling me about?" he asked.

"I haven't a doubt of it!" replied Ben.

Kit, very much ashamed of himself, crawled under the shelter-tent where the boys had been sleeping and refused to be comforted.

"It's just this way, boys," Ben said as they stood looking into each other's faces, questioningly. "It looks like we'll have to get out of this cosy little valley right away."

"Phillips doesn't know what we're here for yet, because he was inquiring for the third flying ma-

chine," Jimmie replied. "If he wants to come to the camp to-night, let him trot right along. If he isn't warned in time we may be able to tie him up like a pig for market."

CHAPTER XIV.

A GAME OF TAG STARTED.

CARL walked over to where Kit lay under the shelter-tent and, seizing him by one leg, drew him forth into the sunlight.

"It's all right, Kit!" he exclaimed. "We've decided that you did a mighty good thing in locating Phillips. We know where he is now, and so it will be all the easier to catch him."

Kit rubbed his eyes sheepishly.

"I thought I'd given the whole snap away," he said.

"You couldn't have done a better job," Carl insisted. "You see it's this way," he continued. "Phillips and Mendoza are still unaware that they have been followed to this locality. At least, we judge so because this alleged ranger asked you concerning a third machine."

"I begin to understand," said Kit brightening.

"This third machine," continued Carl, "is evidently operated by the man who tried to destroy

the *Louise* and the *Bertha* near St. Louis. He came on from New York, the way we have it figured out, to warn the two murderers of the steps which were being taken for their capture."

"And we beat him to it!" cried Kit exultantly.

"Yes, we beat him to it," replied Carl. "And here's another reason," the boy went on, "why we think the outlaws have not yet communicated with the messenger sent on from the east.

"If Phillips had known all the messenger will be able to tell him when they meet, he never would have shown himself to you."

"Jiminy!" exclaimed Kit. "Then I'd be up in that bear tree yet!"

"You might be!" grinned Carl. "Anyhow, you did a good job in locating the outlaws for us. We know now that they're in this section, and that is a whole lot."

"Then we must be somewhere near Two Sisters canyon?" asked Kit.

Carl replied that he believed that they must be, and Kit tumbled back into the shelter-tent in a more cheerful frame of mind.

"There's one thing about this situation that I'm not at all pleased with," Ben remarked, as the boys began working over their machines, oiling, polishing and giving them a more respectable appearance generally. "We saw this third machine cross the range and settle down somewhere off to the south.

My idea is that it can't be very far away at this time, and I'm wondering whether the outlaw who talked with Kit won't find it before night."

"You bet he will!" exclaimed Jimmie. "That blond aviator who tried to blow up our machines will find some way of letting the murderers know that he has news for them."

"Then why don't we go and drive this blond aviator away?" asked Carl.

"I'd like to know how we can do that?" asked Jimmie.

"We might get up in the air and drop a few sticks of dynamite down on him!" suggested Carl. "You know we always carry dynamite in small quantities. He ought to be blown off the earth, anyway!"

"There's no doubt about that," Ben cut in, "but we ought not to be the ones to do it."

"Well, we ought to do something!" insisted Jimmie. "If that blond brute gets to Phillips and Mendosa, we may as well trek back to little old New York! We never can find them in all this mess of hills if they know we're doing the detective stunt."

The boys discussed the problem for a long time without reaching any decision. At last Ben and Carl went to the shelter-tent and fell asleep. There had been very few hours of uninterrupted rest

since leaving New York, and the boys were really "about all in" as Carl expressed it.

Jimmie, thus left alone, climbed into one of the seats of the *Louise* and sat for a long time in deep thought, his freckled chin resting heavily in the palm of his right hand.

"I don't know what the boys would say," the lad finally mused, "but I've a great notion to try it!"

He leaped to the ground and began a careful inspection of the *Louise,* looking to every detail of the mechanism.

"I wish I knew whether he would or not," the boy thought, a slight smile coming to his face. "I just wish I knew whether he'd be fool enough to do it."

Next, Jimmie went to the convenience box under the seat and drew out two automatic revolvers and a searchlight. He saw that the light was in good working order and that the revolvers were loaded. After that he drew on a belt stuffed with cartridges and again took his place on the seat of the machine.

Looking about cautiously, almost furtively, at the shelter tent and the *Bertha,* he saw Kit making his way toward him.

"Come on, Kit!" Jimmie called out softly, so as not to waken the others. "I was just wishing you'd wake up. I want you to be a good little boy, now,

and watch the camp, and not associate with any more grizzly bears until I come back."

Kit looked into the boy's face questioningly.

"And another thing," Jimmie went on, "when Ben and Carl wake up, advise them to go out and get a haunch of bear. You can show them where it is. Bear steak sounds mighty good to me! Only for our excitement over the discovery you made, I would have been out there long ago."

"Where are you going?" asked Kit.

"Why," replied Jimmie, "I'm just going out to exercise my horse. She seems to be getting a little lame standing in the stable."

"Why can't I go?" asked Kit.

"You'll have to watch the camp," Jimmie answered.

Kit stood by the machine when Jimmie pressed the starter. Instead of dropping back and clearing away, the lad bounded nimbly into the seat and looked up at Jimmie with a twisted smile on his face. By this time the *Louise* was well under motion, the wheels humming softly over the grass of the green bowl in which she lay.

"Jump!" cried Jimmie. "You've got to watch the camp, you know!"

Kit hung on tighter. The wheels of the aeroplane left the earth and the propellers whirled softly in the upper air.

"Now you've gone and done it!" Jimmie ex-

claimed half-angrily. "Now I've got to turn back and let you out!"

"I'm going with you!" insisted Kit.

"You're likely to get your neck broken!" advised Jimmie.

"I guess I can stand it if you can!" responded the boy. "Anyway, my neck is long enough to tie."

Jimmie remained thoughtful for a moment, and then turned to his chum.

"Come to think of it," he said, "I guess I would better take you along. You always do seem to blunder into the right procession. You located the outlaws for us, and now you're going out to be the candy boy in the sleuth game. You're all right, Kit!"

"What are you going to do?" demanded the boy.

"Look here," Jimmie declared. "We came out here to do some flying machine stunts, didn't we?"

"That's the idea!" answered Kit.

"Well, we haven't done any stunts yet," Jimmie went on. "We just plugged across the continent, half asleep all the time, like an old horse pulling a cross-town car in New York. We've exercised our machines good and plenty, but we haven't had any real lively fun yet."

"It's kept us awake, anyhow," suggested Kit.

"Well," Jimmie went on, "the machine that followed us from New York is in one of the canyons

over to the south. You remember that we saw it settling down in the darkness.

"And it isn't very far away, either," suggested Kit.

"That's the idea!" returned Jimmie. "It is so near at hand that this imitation ranger you saw is likely to find it at any minute. If he does, it's all off with us!"

"So you're going to bump into this crooked aviator yourself?" asked Kit.

"I aim to keep him busy all day!" Jimmie answered.

"Up in the air, I presume?" queried Kit.

"Exactly," replied Jimmie.

"Then I ought to have stayed behind to watch the camp," Kit mused, regretfully. "The boys may sleep for hours, and some one may wreck or steal the *Bertha*. You see," the boy continued, "I thought you were only out for a short spin, so I had the nerve to jump aboard."

"It's all right to have company," laughed Jimmie, "and now," he added, turning on more power, "we'll have to quit talking, for I'm going to give the motor a tip to get a move on, and her conversation will drown anything we have to say. But before I do this," the boy went on, "I want to pass you this automatic revolver, and tell you that if anything happens to me I want you to catch hold of the

steering apparatus as you've been taught and keep going toward the camp."

"I couldn't run a machine on a bet!" replied Kit sorrowfully.

Jimmie laughed and turned on full speed. Just as the *Louise* swung over the edge of the cup which formed the round valley below, the boy saw Ben and Carl, doubtless awakened by the starting of the motors, rush out of the shelter-tent and wave toward them. It was evident that the two boys left in camp did not think much of Jimmie's unannounced excursion into the air, for their greeting seemed to be more of a command to return than anything else.

A mile away, Jimmie slowed down and, with a field glass, began a close examination of every gully, canyon, and valley which he passed. Finally the glistening planes of an aeroplane came to view, lying on a level stretch of rock only a short distance from the main ridge.

"Here we are, now!" thought the boy. "Here's the other machine! Now, if I can only coax him out of his nest, and keep him amused through the day, I'd like to know how he's going to get time to deliver the message sent by the underworld of New York to Phillips and Mendosa?"

As the boy slowed down again, he saw a figure running wildly around the aeroplane below. He circled the little shelf, dropping lower at each swing.

Presently he darted away, as if satisfied with his scrutiny, and the machine below lifted instantly and gave chase.

"And here," mused Jimmie with a grin, "you'll see the liveliest game of tag ever pulled off in the air!"

CHAPTER XV.

A CRIPPLED AEROPLANE.

LEFT together in the camp, astonished and angry at the sudden departure of Jimmie, Ben and Carl saw the *Louise* disappearing with varying emotions.

"Now what did he do that for?" demanded Carl.

"He's always up to some mischief!" growled Ben.

"Well, if he's going sailing around over the mountains in broad daylight," Carl suggested, "we may as well go up to San Francisco and bring down a band. A brass band wouldn't give us any more prominence in the community, and it might be more amusing."

"Oh, the boy always has some fairly good reason for what he does," defended Ben, chuckling inwardly at the daring of his chum, "but I wish he'd tell us a little more about his plans before he makes such breaks. It would take the strain off a little!" he added.

From the valley in which the *Bertha* lay the boys could not, of course, see what was taking place un-

til the *Louise* was high up above the lower summits, with the third aeroplane in full pursuit.

"Now, what do you think of that?" demanded Carl. "That fool boy has found the crook's machine, and the chances are that he'll be sorry he did it before the day is over!"

"Oh, well," Ben replied, "we'll have to wait and see what comes of this absurd trip. Perhaps we'd better be getting something to eat, so as to be ready for a flight if the boy should need assistance."

While the two were eating a hastily prepared meal, an exclamation of astonishment came from the vicinity of the *Bertha,* and they both sprang to their feet and chased off in that direction.

At first no one could be seen, then a figure crawled slowly out from under the planes and stood upright.

"The Chink!" exclaimed Ben.

"Now, I wonder how he found his way here?" Carl questioned.

"That's the fellow we released from captivity over at the first stopping-place, isn't it?" asked Ben.

"You may search me!" replied Carl. "Negroes and horses and Chinamen all look alike, so far as I'm concerned."

"Me savvee you!" exclaimed the Chinaman, in most outrageous pidgin English. "Me savvee you, alle same."

"Where'd you come from?" demanded Ben impatiently.

The Chinaman put a finger to his lips and looked puzzled.

"No can do!" he said.

"Look here!" Ben exclaimed. "How did you ever find this place, anyway? If a Chink fresh from the odorous Orient can walk in on us like this, I'd like to know what an outlaw who really meant business could do!"

"No can do!" repeated the Chinaman.

"You're the fellow we found tied up, aren't you?" asked Carl.

"Me savvee you!" was the only reply, the words being accompanied by a foolish grin. "Me savvee you, alle same."

Ben pointed to the provisions spread on a cloth lying on the turf.

"Hungry?" he asked. "You seem to me to look rather lank!"

"I bet you don't shake your head at that, and chatter out that everlasting 'No can do'," Carl laughed. "Fall to, friend!" he added.

The Chinaman quickly accepted this invitation, and was soon devouring bread and butter, tinned meats, and vegetables, as if he had eaten nothing before for a week. The boys watched laughingly.

"We're next to you!" Carl cried. "You came

to visit on purpose to get a good feed! Look here!" he added as the Chinaman looked up with a submissive grin, "what did those fellows tie you up for?"

"No can do!" answered the Chinaman. "No can do."

"Go to it!" exclaimed Ben. "Put a couple of pounds of groceries under your belt at our expense and then you may be able to talk United States."

"No can do," was the only answer received to this suggestion.

Watching the man critically as he ate the provisions with all the gusto of one near to the point of starvation, Ben thought he saw indications of a different sort of a life in his manner of handling his food.

The fellow's face expressed only stupidity. His eyes were dull and staring, but the manner in which he brought the food to his mouth was not that of a man who had been trained to eat with chopsticks.

In a moment Ben drew his chum to one side.

"There's something strange about that Chink," he said, when they were out of hearing of their strange guest. "He's not as stupid or as ignorant as he would have us believe. And he never stumbled on us by chance, either! How does the idea strike you?"

"There is no doubt in my mind that the fellow is disguised in manner and speech if not in person," Carl replied. "For all we know, he may be one of the leaders of the smuggling gang."

"Then why should the bunch we found in the cavern tie him up?" asked Ben. "You remember the shape in which he was found?"

"I guess we'll have to decide that we don't know anything about it!" Carl replied. "We only know that we stirred up a nest of Chinamen, and that they ran away from us like rats. We don't know where they went to either, although we may have time to find out later on."

"We might have learned something more concerning the combination right there," Ben grumbled, "only for the second beacon light and the schooner. Of course we couldn't remain there with a new bunch of smuggled Celestials swarming about our ears."

"We don't know yet whether that schooner landed any Chinamen or not!" suggested Carl. "We had to duck away so fast that we couldn't see what took place. I wish we'd kept in the air long enough to find out!"

"I don't wish anything of the kind!" Ben declared. "Daylight was coming on and Mr. Havens told us to keep out of the air except during the night. After we round up Phillips and Mendoza, we may take a throw at the smugglers."

"Perhaps Jimmie has gone over to the coast now," suggested Carl.

"Much good it will do him!" grumbled Ben, "with that outlaw machine chasing him up! I'm afraid the boy has got us into serious trouble," he added, "though I'm sure he meant everything for the best!"

During this conversation the strange visitor had been busy with the provisions. He now drew back and regarded his hosts through half-open eyes. The two boys approached the place where he sat.

"Me savvee you, alle same!" the Chinaman said.

As he spoke he drew one yellow finger across a wrist and an ankle, thus indicating that he remembered them as friends because they had released him. Then he arose to his feet and looked about.

"Savvee him," he exclaimed pointing to the *Bertha*. "Savvee mate, alle same!"

The Chinaman pointed straight to the east as he spoke.

"Do you mean," asked Ben, "that you saw a machine like that in that direction? How long ago was it?"

"No can do!" replied the Chinaman shaking his head vigorously.

"I believe he understands well enough," exclaimed Carl. "I believe he knows what we're talking about!"

The chinaman gazed stupidly from one boy to the

other and then turned away. The lads gazed after him in amazement.

"Where are you going?" asked Ben, and the Chinaman turned back.

"Savvee you, alle same!" he replied and pointed off to the north. "Savvee you, alle same," he repeated. "No can do."

"Go to it!" shouted Carl. "Trot along and play you're in a Chinese laundry on Pell street. We love to see you eat, but we don't like the exuberance of your conversation!"

In ten minutes' time the Chinaman, climbing the steep dip of the bowl toward the north, disappeared from view in a thicket.

"Well, of all the consarned, everlasting, inscrutable combinations I ever saw in my life!" exclaimed Carl, "this combination of Chinaman and ignorance and hunger is about the worst! Now, what do you suppose he came in here for, and then went away in broad daylight?"

"He probably came here to fill up!" answered Ben.

"What do you understand he meant by pointing to the *Bertha* and then pointing east? It seemed to me that he wanted to inform us that he had seen a machine like that in that direction."

"It might have been the outlaw machine now chasing Jimmie," suggested Ben. "He might have

seen it before it passed over to the coast. It's a wonder to me that he wouldn't get out of the country after being trussed up by his own people."

"It's just one of the mysteries of the case," laughed Carl. "We don't know anything about the Chinaman, or of Jimmie's motive in going away, or of the smugglers!"

The boys gathered up the remnants of the meal and sat down to wait for the return of their chum. They had remained seated only a short time when Carl called the other's attention to the glistening planes of a flying machine away to the north and east.

"There's the Chink's machine!" he exclaimed.

Both boys sprang to their feet and Ben rushed to the *Bertha* for a field glass. He looked steadily at the machine for a moment before speaking, then he handed the glass to Carl.

"That's certainly one of the largest aeroplanes I ever saw!" he cried. "I've seen big ones, but I never saw anything like that before! What do you make of it?" he continued as Carl lowered the glass.

"I've been thinking," the latter replied, "that it might be the *Ann!*"

"If it is," Ben answered, "she will miss us, for there she goes straight off toward San Francisco. She'll miss us sure!"

"Why don't we get up in the air and chase her up?" asked Carl.

"I was just thinking of that," answered Ben, "but, you see, there's Jimmie and Kit away, and they'd never be able to find us!"

"Don't you ever think they won't be able to find us!" exclaimed Carl. "You can't hide a flying machine the size of the *Bertha* by taking it up in the air. First thing we know," he continued, "we'll have all four machines bunched. And then there's likely to be a mix-up!"

"Well," Ben said, "if we're going to start after that flying machine, we may as well be getting under way."

As will be remembered, the *Bertha* had been overhauled early that very morning, and now it took only a moment to get her into the air. When she came to the lip of the valley the boys saw the large aeroplane sailing northward at great speed. Before Ben put on full power he turned to Carl with an anxious look on his face.

"I shall have all I can attend to at the levers," he said, "so you'll have to keep watch for Jimmie and his outlaw escort. Keep your eye on the sky every minute of the time, and if you see two flying machines doing a Marathon, just give me a poke in the ribs with your elbow."

Carl nodded and Ben put on full speed, after which conversation was, of course, impossible.

The machine ahead was going at terrific speed, and the *Bertha* for a time had all she could do to keep in sight of her. At that time it was not a question of overhauling their quarry. The plucky little *Bertha,* however, clung tightly to the chase, and Ben saw crags, canyons, shelves of rock, and grassy valleys go whirling under his feet as one watches a swiftly flying landscape from the window of a mile-a-minute train.

All through the exciting flight Carl kept his glass in use. He searched the sea, now plainly visible to the west, the green landscape to the east, and the rocky summits to the north and south but for a long time, caught no glimpse of what he sought. After the chase had continued a couple of hours the boys felt the machine sinking beneath them. They both knew that there could be no good reason for this, as everything had been in working order only a short time before.

Ben examined the mechanism as carefully as he could from his seat and Carl glanced apprehensively at the tanks. Their judgment told them that everything about the flying machine was exactly as it should be, and yet she kept dropping down without any apparent reason.

Straight ahead was a level summit comparatively clear of rocks. Realizing that something must be done at once, Ben shut off the motors and volplaned down. The machine sank faster and

faster, and the boys looked at each other with frightened eyes.

It seemed as if the machine must fall short of the summit!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE INSIDE OF A JAIL.

As has been said, it was morning when Havens caught sight of the pretty little city of Monterey on the Pacific coast. He had traveled steadily all night, and was very tired, so he decided to drop down near the town and rest during the day. Remembering the instructions he had given to the boys, he had no thought of seeing either the *Louise* or the *Bertha* in the air at that time.

The young millionaire had made a very swift flight across the continent. It will be remembered that he had left New York city something like twenty-four hours after the departure of the boys. The *Bertha* and the *Louise* had spent fully twenty-four hours at St. Louis waiting for some news of the *Ann*. On the morning when Havens alighted a short distance from Monterey, the Flying Machine Boys had been on the coast something like twelve hours. It will be understood, therefore, that the *Ann* had followed not far behind the *Louise* and *Bertha*.

While the young millionaire was sleeping at a neat hotel, after breakfast and a refreshing bath, Ben and his chums were discussing the situation in the little grass bowl into which they had dropped the machines during the dark hours.

Before leaving the *Ann,* Havens had, as he thought, taken extra precautions for her safety. He had landed on a level surface in the outskirts of the town, and had employed the man in charge of the local garage to supply him with gasoline and at the same time station guards about the machine.

While Havens slept a man who gave every indication of having traveled over a long distance in a short time dashed into the hotel office and up to the counter. The clerk eyed him coolly, as became a clerk having a proper respect for his own dignity.

"Havens!" panted the man. "Is Mr. Havens here?"

"He is!" replied the clerk, readjusting the diamond pin in his neck-scarf. "What do you want of Mr. Havens?"

"I want to see him!" was the panting reply.

"He left orders not to be disturbed!" growled the clerk.

"But he told me to let him know if anything happened to his machine!" insisted the other. "Will you send for him?"

"I will not!" answered the clerk impudently.

"Then I shall have to go to his room!"

"I shall see that you don't!" snarled the young man behind the counter.

"It's a serious matter!" almost shouted the man in front of the desk.

"Write out a message, explaining your errand," commanded the clerk, "and I'll have a boy take it to his room!"

The panting man reached calmly and deliberately over the counter, seized the obstreperous clerk by the collar of his coat, and dragged him over the obstruction. There he gave him such a shaking as a dog might have given a rat, pitched him headlong to the floor, and gaily mounted the stairs, taking three at a jump.

When he reached the top step the hall was ringing with his great bass voice, and a little crowd was gathering below.

"Havens! Havens! Havens!" called the man who had assaulted the clerk.

It was not necessary for him to call many times, for the door of the millionaire's room opened almost instantly and his tired face looked out on the man who was creating the disturbance.

"I thought I'd never get to you, Mr. Havens!" declared the intruder.

"You must have important information!" smiled the millionaire.

"I think," the other went on, "that before we

stop to discuss possibilities, you'd better get your clothing on and make a break for the field where you left the airship!"

In an instant Havens stood by the little heap of clothing he had discarded not so very long before, and he was soon dressed and ready for the street. Then he turned to the red-faced man at his side.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Rough-house!" was the reply.

"At the flying machine?" asked Havens.

"Yes," was the disgusted reply. "There's a man there claiming the machine as stolen property, and there's a crowd of yaps ready to back him up. When I left, the two men I hired were standing them off with loaded guns, but I don't know how long they can hold the fort," he added with a smile. "It looked pretty serious when I left."

For a moment Havens was almost dazed by the information. It meant that word of his departure, and of that of the boys, had at last reached the friends of Phillips and Mendoza on the Pacific coast. In some manner the nature of his mission was known there at Monterey, and the friends of the two outlaws were already busy.

"The first to do," Havens suggested, as they passed down the stairway, "is to notify the officers."

"The fellow who claims the machine insists that

he is acting for the officers," answered Stroup, the garage man.

"Well," continued Havens, "we'll have to take the sheriff and the chief of police out there, and find out whether he does represent the officers or not. We can soon settle his case."

"I'm afraid," Stroup replied hesitatingly, "that we won't find any machine there when we get back. It was just a riot!" he continued angrily.

"The machine not there!" shouted Havens leaping for the door.

When he reached the porch in front of the little hotel he missed Stroup and looked back. The garage man stood in front of the clerk and the house detective who were attempting to place him under arrest for the assault recently committed.

Enraged at the delay the young man hastened back into the hotel office.

"What's the trouble here?" he demanded.

The whiskey-faced man standing beside the clerk tapped a brass badge on the lapel of his coat significantly.

"I'm the house detective!" he declared.

"Glad to know you!" answered Havens. "What's up?"

"I'm arresting this man for assault and battery, and for resisting an officer. He's committed an outrageous attack on the clerk."

Stroup passed an inquiring glance at the mil-

lionaire, and Havens quietly amused yet still anxious, gave a slight nod.

The next instant the maul-like fist of the garage man shot out with lightning rapidity, and the clerk and the house detective tumbled over on the floor. Before the clerk could straighten his necktie, or the house detective staunch the flow of blood from his nose, Havens and Stroup were well out of the house and on their way toward the threatened flying machine, both looking rather sober.

As luck would have it, the hotel 'bus was just backing up to the walk a short distance away, and the two fugitives immediately boarded her.

"Drive to the aeroplane!" shouted Stroup.

"Isn't that rather indefinite?" asked Havens. "We can't afford to lose any time, you know."

"Every man, woman, and child in town knows where the flying machine is long before this!" answered the driver with a smile. "I've sent three loads out there this morning now," he added.

"As the 'bus lumbered away, half a dozen excited individuals dashed out of the hotel door and shouted for the driver to draw up. For a moment the fellow hesitated and then began pulling on the reins.

"Get a move on! Get a move on!" shouted Stroup.

"But there seems to be other passengers," argued the driver.

Havens hastily drew a ten-dollar bank-note from his pocket and thrust it through the little opening to the driver.

"I'll charter the 'bus for the trip!" he said with a smile. "Now run away from the whole bunch."

"Are you the owner of the machine?" asked the fellow.

"He certainly is!" answered Stroup. "Go faster!"

"I'll do that," agreed the driver, "because I think there's something doing out there."

As the lumbering old vehicle drew away, lurching from side to side as the horses ran at full speed, the crowd forming in front of the hotel took to the middle of the street and followed on in hot pursuit, shouting at the top of their lungs. Stroup eyed the procession grimly.

"At any rate," he said, "we're taking the right course to bring all the officers in the city to the field where the machine lies."

"I hope they'll get there before any mischief is done," said Havens. "But look here," he went on, "what was the trouble at the hotel? What was that fellow arresting you for?"

"Why, he wouldn't let me up to your room," explained Stroup, "and I shook him up a little. It is funny, the way his bones rattled as I dumped him over in a corner of the room."

"You'll probably have a fine to pay," Havens

suggested, " but I'll see that it doesn't cost you anything."

" It's worth a ten-dollar note to get your clutches on a puppy like that!" said Stroup angrily. " He knew very well that my business was important, for he had heard talk about trouble at the machine, and yet he wanted to show his own importance at your expense."

As the 'bus rolled and swayed down the street, it was followed by a motley procession of hacks, delivery wagons, and private carriages. When at last the aviator came in sight of the field where his machine had been left he saw that it still lay on the ground.

" It's there yet, all right!" shouted Stroup. " I guess we didn't get here any too soon, however!"

Those at the machine, the ones endeavoring to remove it under a fraudulent process of law, saw the long line of vehicles trailing up the street with the hotel 'bus at the head. Havens saw the crowd parting and running in different directions, and then the *Ann* lifted slowly into the air.

At that moment Stroup was by far the more excited man of the two. He opened the 'bus door and stood on the steps outside, waving one hand frantically, his face glowing with excitement.

" Stop her, stop her!" he shouted.

The only answer which came was a cheer from

the mob gathered below the now swiftly ascending aeroplane.

When at last the 'bus reached the spot where the flying machine had lain, it was at once surrounded by a crowd of curious and impertinent spectators. Havens sprang to the ground and opened a conversation with the first man he saw.

"I understand that the man who took the machine claims to be an officer," he said. "Will you point him out to me?"

"I am the officer!" said the fellow sticking out his chest.

"Where are your papers?" demanded Havens.

"A man don't need no papers," was the insulting reply, "in order to take possession of stolen property, wherever he can find it!"

Stroup now pushed his way through the crowd to Havens' side and looked the fellow over with threatening eyes.

"Talk civil!" he advised in a moment.

"Now, Stroup," said the officer, "don't you go to butting into this!"

"That's the man who let the thieves take my machine!" said Havens with suppressed passion.

"That's too bad," exclaimed Stroup moving nearer to the officer.

Before Havens could lift a finger or say a word to prevent, Stroup shot out a great fist which landed squarely between the eyes of the officer. The fel-

low went down in a huddle on the ground, but the next moment the posse he had gathered in order to back him in taking possession of the machine gathered about Havens and Stroup.

"Here, here!" shouted a man in uniform pushing through the crowd. "I arrest both of you fellows!"

"It strikes me," Havens smiled, "that that really is the best way out of it. This mob begins to look ugly."

The two men willingly entered the 'bus with the officer and were hastily driven to the city prison. When at last the door was closed and locked against them, Havens turned to Stroup.

"Well," he said, "for all long-distance, ready-for-action bruisers I ever saw, you certainly take the cake! You've assaulted three men and got us both locked up! And yet," he added, "I rather like it!"

Stroup blushed and grinned and said not a word.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MESSAGE FROM THE SKY.

For a time it looked as if the *Bertha* must fall far short of the summit and drop to the jagged rocks below. There was nothing whatever the boys could do. The song of the motors had almost ceased, and they understood that through some mischance the gasoline tank had become empty. The situation was a critical one.

The angle at which the flying machine was descending, however, included the summit to which the boys were directing her. In a few moments she landed at the top, and almost rolled down the opposite slope before the momentum could be checked.

Ben instantly ran to the tanks and found them empty. He called to Carl, and the two made a close examination of other portions of the machine. There was nothing wrong anywhere except that the tanks were dry!

Ben pointed to the drain cock at the bottom and found that it had been turned about half-way. That explained the situation.

"What surprises me," he said, "is that we never noticed the leak. Why, we should have been able to smell the wasting gasoline before we left the camp. I don't understand why we didn't."

"That's easy," explained Carl. "We were cleaning up the machines this morning, oiling and shifting a little gasoline from one car to the other, and so we never noted the additional evaporation."

"I'm sure I never turned that cock when I was working over the machine!" declared Ben. "And I think I'm the only one who worked around the tanks."

"Look here," exclaimed Carl a sudden suspicion coming into his face, "you remember the Chinaman who came out from under the planes and consumed about a dollar's worth of groceries!"

Ben stared at his chum for a moment and then dropped down on the ground. His face was hard and set.

"That's it!" he cried angrily. "That's just it! The Chink run our perfectly good gasoline into the ground and then sat down at our hospitable board. I only wish I had him here right by the pigtail!"

"In that case," suggested Carl, "I don't think he'd want another square meal in about three months. His greatest need would be a hospital."

"There's no doubt of that!" replied Ben. "Why, it was actually murder to do what that fellow did! I had an idea while he was eating that

he didn't act exactly like a man accustomed to eating with chopsticks. I've seen men at Sherry's who didn't have any better table manners than he had. That fellow was a fraud!"

While the boys were exclaiming over the loss of their gasoline and wondering how they were ever going to get the *Bertha* out of the position in which she now lay, Carl threw a cushion from one of the seats and sat down upon it, with the remark that it made the rock some softer.

Ben stepped forward and drew a folded slip of paper from the under side of the cushion and held it up.

"Did you leave that there?" he asked.

Carl shook his head wonderingly.

"Of course not," he replied. "I don't drop any letters in the post-office when I can communicate verbally with the man I want to advise with. Perhaps Jimmie or Kit left it there."

"Well, the way to find out about it is to open it," suggested Ben, "so here goes! There certainly isn't much of it."

The boy opened the note and read aloud for the benefit of his chum, who stood by eager-eyed and excited.

"'Don't leave this place with the machine. The gasoline is out, or nearly so.'"

"Is it written in Chinese?" asked Carl with a frown.

"Chinese, nothing!" exclaimed Ben. "It's good honest English, and written in a pretty good hand at that!

"Then that Chink wasn't a Chink at all!" cried Carl.

"There are Chinamen who can read and write English," suggested Ben.

"But this fellow pretended that he couldn't even understand English."

"I'd give a heap to know something about this puzzle," Ben declared. "We find this fellow tied up in a smugglers' cave one night, and the next morning we find him snooping about our camp, consuming our provisions and wasting our gasoline. That was a treacherous trick for him to play on us! I hope we'll come across him some other day."

"The question before the house right now," Carl explained, "is how we're going to get off this bald-headed old peak. We might be able to tumble down into one of the valleys below, but we wouldn't be any better off there than we are here. Besides," he went on, "our making our way down wouldn't help us any with the machine."

"If Jimmie would only show up with the *Louise*, now, we might borrow enough gasoline to get us back to level ground again. And still," Ben went on, "we wouldn't have fuel enough to do much racing until the tanks were filled. It's a rotten scrape we're in, and that's no fairy tale."

"Here's a problem for you to solve when you get through with all the others," grinned Carl. "I want you to tell me why that Chink wasted our gasoline, and then warned us not to use the machine."

"I give it up!" declared Ben. "There's no use of trying to guess it out! It's just another little old mystery!"

"And why did he pretend that he couldn't understand English?" persisted Carl. "Was that in order that he might hear what we were talking about without our suspecting that he was listening with the intention of betraying us? It seems to me that that must be it."

"I tell you I don't know!" almost shouted Ben, "and I'm not going to puzzle over the matter any longer. Here we are up on a bald old peak without any show of ever getting our machine down to the ground again, and that's enough for me to brood over for the time being."

"This is a beautiful view from this mountain!" suggested Carl, with a grin. "Note the sunlight on the valleys below."

"Aw, dry up!" cried Ben. "What's the use of rubbing it in?"

"But," urged Carl, "just think of the situation Noah was in when he landed his Ark on top of a mountain!"

Ben threw a pebble at his chum and turned moodily away.

"I wouldn't have your disposition for a barrel of gasoline!" laughed Carl.

"I wish I could trade my disposition for a barrel of gasoline," grinned Ben. "That might help some."

"Well," Carl said rather excitedly, in a moment, "you may keep your precious disposition, for here comes our barrel of gasoline!"

"You must have been reading a dream book!" exclaimed Ben.

"Honest!" shouted Carl. "If you'll take a squint up there to the north, you'll see the *Ann* come poking back! If you don't believe that is the *Ann* with Havens on board, just observe the signals in sight."

"I guess that's the *Ann* all right," Ben returned. "I hope she's got full tanks of fuel. We need a lot right now."

The great flying machine came winging south at a great rate of speed, and finally, after circling the peak several times, volplaned down to the *Bertha*. The boys sprang forward to greet Havens, but drew back in a moment for the aviator was a man they had never seen before.

The machine was the *Ann,* sure enough but she was in the hands of two men who were total

strangers to the boys. They were slender, dark fellows, with oblong eyes and low foreheads.

"The *Bertha?*" asked one of the men in almost perfect English, stepping close to the machine. "You seem to have met with an accident."

"It's the *Bertha* all right," Ben answered, "and we're out of gasoline."

"And where is the *Louise?*" asked the other.

"Off on a scout somewhere," was the indefinite reply.

"That's unfortunate," the other began, "for we are instructed by Mr. Havens to notify you all to turn back to New York at once."

"What's the meaning of that?" demanded Carl.

"Mr. Havens didn't take me into his confidence to any great extent," was the reply, "but I understood from what he said that you were no longer needed in this section. Is there any way you can signal to the *Louise?*"

Now Ben did not believe the man to be speaking the truth. In the first place, Havens would never have sent an entire stranger in the *Ann*. In the second place, Phillips, one of the murderers, had been seen at liberty in that district that very morning, so the hunt was still on!

The natural result of this reasoning was the belief on the part of the boy that the *Ann* had been stolen.

"We have no means of reaching the *Louise*,"

Ben replied after studying the matter over for a moment. "In fact Jimmie went away with her without our knowledge or consent. We don't know where he is."

While answering in this manner, a third reason for disbelieving the statement of the Japanese, for such the men appeared to be, was that Jimmie had been chased desperately by the machine which they had seen on the coast during the night. The boy drew away suspiciously.

"If you don't mind," the Japanese said then, "we'll loan you gasoline enough to keep you in motion until the tanks can be filled."

"That's just what I was about to propose!" exclaimed Ben.

"Where are you going in the *Ann?*" asked Carl.

"After fitting you out," was the reply, "we are going to find the other machine, deliver our message, and turn back east."

"Supply us with fuel," Ben suggested, "and we'll go with you in search of Jimmie. Perhaps we can help you find him."

The two men who had arrived in the *Ann* conferred together for a few moments, and then one of them began supplying the tanks of the *Bertha* with gasoline. The boys stood by in a brown study as to what they ought to do next. The Japanese eyed them keenly.

"We want to stay right by the machine, so they won't hop up and run away!" Carl whispered to Ben.

"If they do, I'll send a bullet after them!" Ben whispered back.

While the boys talked at one side of the *Bertha* and the two Japs engaged in conversation on the other side, an aeroplane shot into view, coming swiftly from the west.

"I guess that's Jimmie now," suggested Ben turning to the Japs. "In that case you can deliver your message, and we'll all go east together.

As the reader will understand it was by no means the intention of the boys to follow the instructions given by the Japs. They had been supplied with gasoline enough to last for several hours, and their purpose now was to get out of the company of the strangers as soon as possible.

There was an indefinite resolve at the back of Ben's brain to get out of the company of the Japs by leaving them stranded on the summit! It was a daring thought, but the boy was actually considering the possibility of getting away in the *Ann* while Carl navigated the *Bertha.*

If the aeroplane now approaching proved to be the *Louise,* he thought, the trick might be turned with the assistance of Jimmie and Kit.

Presently Carl leaned forward and whispered in his chum's ear:

"That isn't the *Louise* by a long shot!"

"How do you know?" demanded Ben.

"Because of the way she carries herself," returned Carl, speaking in a low whisper, thereby bringing two pair of suspicious eyes in his direction. "That's what we call the third machine!" he added.

"You can run the *Ann*, can't you?" asked Ben.

"You bet I can!" was the reply.

"Then get ready to make a jump for the seat!" whispered Ben. "We've just got to recover the stolen machine and get away from these Japs. And we've got to do it before that other machine gets here, too," he went on, "because it's pears to pumpkins that the man aboard of her is the blond brute who tried to blow up the *Louise* and the *Bertha* near St. Louis!"

"I'd like to know where Havens is!" whispered Carl.

"We haven't got time to consider that," suggested Ben. "When that aeroplane gets a little closer, these two fellows will be watching her and perhaps signaling. That will be the time for us to act. Jump on the *Ann* and press the button and I'll do the same with the *Bertha*. We may get dumped down the mountainside, or we may catch a couple of bullets, but anything is better than being tricked by these Japs and losing our machine and Havens', too! Watch for the chance."

The moment for action came almost immediately. The Japs ran to the edge of the level space and flung their arms wildly into the air. At the same instant, the boys sprang to seats on the two machines and pushed the levers which controlled the starters.

THE RACE.

CHAPTER XVIII

JIMMIE'S game of tag developed into such a flying machine race as has rarely been witnessed. The machines were in superb condition, and each aviator was determined to end the contest satisfactorily to himself. The driver of the third machine sought only the capture or destruction of the *Louise*.

On the other hand, Jimmie's only motive was, as he had expressed himself to Kit before leaving, to keep his opponent amused so that he might not communicate to the outlaws any information concerning the net which had been set for their capture.

The fact that the third machine followed the *Louise* so savagely, so persistently, convinced the boys that the driver had not as yet communicated with Phillips or Mendosa. In fact, one question asked by Phillips of Kit that morning demonstrated that the outlaws had not yet been found.

Jimmie headed at first straight for the ocean. There was exhilaration in the swift passage over the white-capped waves below. He swung over the headland from which the first signal light had been seen on the previous evening.

Then he turned straight south and passed the second promontory. He saw that the schooner which had been seen the night before still lay at anchor, and that her deck was crowded with humanity.

"Chinks!" he thought. "Waiting to be taken to the land of promise!"

The same thought occurred to Kit, and the boy pointed downward as they cut the air above the deck.

"Smugglers!" the boy said.

Jimmie heard the word only faintly and nodded. Back from the ocean, they swung almost to the right of way of the Southern Pacific railroad. Below them opened great gorges in which a city might be hidden. There were immense forests which seemed of sufficient size to furnish a world in fuel for a thousand years. Here and there small rivulets trickled down the rugged mountainsides and joined larger streams, trailing off into the interior. It was like viewing a magic panorama.

The exciting race continued until long after noon. The *Louise* was by far the swifter machine of the two, and so the pursuer was obliged to resort to every trick known to aviators in order to keep her in view.

The strain on the rear aeroplane was much greater than that on the *Louise*. The result of this was that the latter machine lasted longer in the swift

competition. About the middle of the afternoon, she began moving away from her pursuer and soon lost sight of her entirely.

Then Jimmie, after dropping down behind a summit, reduced speed in order to exchange ideas with his companion.

"Did you see where she went, Kit?" he asked.

"She just lagged behind!" was the reply.

"There may be some trick about it!" suggested Jimmie.

"If you leave it to me," Kit went on, "there's something the matter with her spark plug. I noticed her limping along half an hour before we lost sight of her."

"In that case," Jimmie explained, "he'll have to make a landing in order to repair the damage, and, if he hasn't got an extra plug with him, he can't repair it at all."

"What does the situation suggest to you?" asked Kit with a laugh.

"Dinner-time!" replied Jimmie.

"That's the idea!" Kit responded.

"And we may as well go over into the valley we left this morning," Jimmie went on, "because the boys will be wondering what has become of us."

"It was a bad thing to do, running off like that!" exclaimed Kit.

"Well," Jimmie retorted, "we had to keep that other fellow amused, didn't we? That was one of

the outlaws we're after who was walking around in a forest ranger's uniform, within a mile or two of where the fellow lay, and there was the possibility that he would blunder on the machine and spoil our game. We just had to get the aeroplane away."

"Of course the outlaw saw the chase," suggested Kit.

"I don't doubt it," answered Jimmie.

Flying low so as not to be seen unless the pursuer should rise at a great altitude, Jimmie made his way to the little green-bowl of a valley which had been deserted by Ben and Carl only a short time before.

Scarcely believing his senses, the boy brought the *Louise* to the ground and anxiously looked for some message, for it seemed highly improbable to him that the boys would have gone away without indicating their destination. Of course he found nothing of the kind.

The only thing discovered about the little camp which in any way accounted for the absence of the *Bertha* was quite a large heap of table scraps. Jimmie pointed to the pile with a grin.

"They've had to go out after grub," he explained. "I'll just bet they had company for dinner and ate up everything we had. Then they went off to some little town on the Southern Pacific railroad to buy provisions. Wonder they wouldn't leave some word! he added impatiently.

"Leave some word just like you did!" taunted Kit.

"Well," Jimmie said in an apologetic tone, "I expected to be back right off and I didn't want to wake them up!"

"Perhaps they expected to be back right off, too!" laughed Kit.

"I'll just tell you what I'm going to do right now!" Jimmie exclaimed. "I'm going up in the woods and get a bear steak. The meat will be all right yet, won't it?"

"I should say not!" replied Kit. "I know enough about hunting to know that that bear meat will be smelling like a slaughter house right now!"

"Anyhow," Jimmie insisted, "I'm going up and see about it!"

Leaving Kit sitting by the machine, the boy hastened up to the place where the bear had been shot and stopped beside a heap of fur which lay on the ground at the foot of the tree. He gave the bearskin a little kick with his foot and then turned his eyes in the direction of the thicket. There was no sign of the carcass. The skin had been deftly removed, and nothing but such parts as were uneatable remained.

Mournfully pressing his hands to the waistband of his trousers, the boy set his face toward the camp and sat down by Kit without a word.

"Where's your bear meat?" asked Kit with a

grin. "Why didn't you bring back a lot of it? You didn't eat it raw, did you?"

"It's gone!" answered Jimmie.

"Gone stale?" asked Kit.

"Gone away!" grunted the other.

"Well, who took it away?"

"Search me," was the answer. "There's about a ton of perfectly good bear meat all gone to waste!" he continued.

While the boys discussed the chances of the meat having been taken care of by their chums, the thicket on the east wall of the bowl opened and the man Kit had seen in the morning appeared. He approached the camp openly and frankly, extending in one hand a great slice of bear meat. Before he reached the place where the boys sat gazing with surprised glances in his direction, the thicket parted again and a taller, slighter, darker man made his appearance.

The man in the uniform of a forest ranger stooped for a moment, spoke to the other in low tones, and then the two came on together. As Jimmie afterwards described the situation, you could have knocked his head off with a match at that moment. Kit was equally excited, and Jimmie declares to this day that the boy turned the color of milk.

The boys knew who their guests were. One was Phillips and one was Mendosa! These were the

outlaws they had journeyed across the continent in the currents of the air to bring to punishment!

If speech had been required of the two lads at that moment it would have been impossible for them to respond. The faces of the outlaws, however, were friendly, and directly the nerve of the boys began to assert itself. Jimmie half arose and then dropped back again.

"Never mind getting up," Phillips said. "I saw you up in the thicket a few moments ago, looking after the bear I killed this morning. You seemed to me to be hungry for steak, and so I brought you down a few pounds."

"That's mighty good of you!" Jimmie managed to say.

"Oh, we couldn't eat a whole bear!" laughed Mendosa.

"I think I could, right this minute," Jimmie responded, more courageously. "I've been out all day in the *Louise,* and I'm so empty that I'd collapse if it wasn't for the wind I brought down with me."

"I see no reason why you shouldn't eat, then," Phillips answered. "You can build a fire and have this steak broiling in a very short time."

"Will you stay and help us eat it?" asked Jimmie.

Phillips glanced toward Mendoza, and the latter nodded.

"We shall be glad to," answered the outlaw. "But where are the others?" he went on. "I thought there were four of you and two machines."

"The others have gone out for exercise!" laughed Kit.

Jimmie's one purpose now was to keep the outlaws in his company until the return of his chums. They were desperate men, and he had no notion of attempting their capture with only Kit to help.

It goes without saying, then, that he was remarkably slow in gathering fuel for the fire, remarkably slow in broiling the steak, and slower still in preparing the coffee. It seemed to him that the outlaws regarded his dilatory movements impatiently.

The boy rightly concluded that they were about half starved for a warm meal. Hiding for days as they had been in the mountains, it was more than probable that they had not risked their liberty by building a fire.

While the steak was broiling, an idea came to Jimmie which he was not slow to carry out. Glancing at the ranger uniform of Phillips, he asked quite innocently:

"Are you after the fake ranger, too?"

Phillips remained perfectly calm, but Mendosa gave a quick start.

"What do you mean by that?" the former asked, easily.

"Why," Jimmie answered, drawing extensively on his imagination, "we met a flying machine man when we went out this morning and he chased us."

"I saw something of the race," Phillips smiled. "I was just going to ask you about that. Why did he chase you?"

"I guess he thought we were trespassing on government land," the boy replied. "After he overtook us he asked all sorts of questions about the people we had met in the mountains. After a while, he said that he was the chief ranger from San Francisco, and that he was here in search of men who are making trouble for the government by pretending to be rangers. He said he had other machines coming, and that the district would be patrolled until the frauds were arrested."

Phillips and Mendoza exchanged significant glances.

"Yes," the former said, "I had advices three days ago that the man was coming. That's why I asked the little fellow this morning if he had seen a third machine. I hoped to see the chief ranger before night."

Jimmie was so full of amusement at the ease with which Phillips had fallen for the manufactured story that it was with difficulty that he restrained a chuckle. The success of the story surprised him not a little.

He believed now that the outlaws would shun

any man who might approach them in an aeroplane, and that the chance for a meeting between the outlaws and their allies was now nothing at all.

"Yes," Jimmie said shortly, keeping his face straight by a great effort, "the chief said he expected to meet every ranger in the forest within a day or two. If you go a few miles farther south you may run across him to-night. He said he had failed to find any one in this region, and would not return here for a couple of days."

"Oh, my, oh, my!" thought Kit, walking away from the fire in order to conceal his amusement, "if Jimmie isn't fixing it so the outlaws will hang right around here until we can get help."

Phillips and Mendosa conversed together for a long time in low tones and then the former said:

"We are pretty tired, so we won't tramp after the chief to-night. To-morrow, if you have no objections, we'd like to have you take to the air and locate him for us. We'll camp here to-night."

"That'll be all right," Jimmie answered, with apparent frankness, but his thought at the moment was that between that time and morning the outlaws would attempt to steal the *Louise* and get away.

Perhaps, also he might be forced to serve them as aviator!

CHAPTER XIX.

A SHORT TERM IN JAIL.

If the truth must be told, both Ben and Carl experienced a sudden lifting of the hair as the *Ann* and the *Bertha* plunged toward the precipice hanging below the summit. It seemed for a time as if the wheels would never lift, but finally, at the last instant, they did so, and the level surface of rock was left below. The Japs who had been so neatly tricked seemed to the boys to be running around in circles and shooting useless bullets into the air up to the time the flying machine to which they had beckoned reached their side.

The third machine, however, did not remain long on the summit. The Japs, and the aviator conferred together for only a moment, and then, with the Japs watching, the planes were in the air again in swift pursuit of the *Ann* and the *Bertha*.

From the very first the boys saw that the pursuing machine was by no means fit for the race. In fact, she limped along at a pace not calculated to hold her own with a very ordinary aeroplane while

both the *Bertha* and the *Ann* were very speedy machines.

Under these conditions the race could end in only one way. The *Ann* and *Bertha* passed swiftly toward Monterey, while the third machine returned to the summit where the two Japs had been left, to take them off, one at a time. The last the boys saw of her at that time she was settling limply down as if injured in a vital spot.

After the pursuit had ceased the boys dropped their machines to a government roadway which showed through the timber in a valley below. The gasoline supplied by the Japs to the *Bertha* was insufficient for a long run, and the idea in dropping down was to transfer fuel from the tanks of the *Ann*. Besides, the boys thought it best to consult together.

"The good old *Ann!*" shouted Carl, patting the great aeroplane as he would have petted a dog.

"I wish you could tell us exactly what has taken place in your vicinity since we last saw you in Westchester county," said Ben, petting the *Ann*.

"I reckon she'd have some story to tell," Carl suggested.

"You bet she would!" declared Ben. "The chances are that Mr. Havens started away from New York with her, and got sidetracked in some way," he went on. "I hope he hasn't been seriously injured."

"I taink we ought to go to Monterey," Carl suggested, "and find out if there is any story going round of a lost aviator. If anything serious has taken place in this part of the country, we'll certainly learn all about it there. Besides," he went on, "we ought to buy more gasoline, and I want to eat. It seems to me something like a hundred years since I sat down to a square meal in a hotel or restaurant."

"And we have to buy provisions for the other boys, too," Ben agreed.

While the boys talked over the situation a man in the uniform of a forest ranger, mounted on a little brown pony, came galloping down the road. He drew up when he saw the machines blocking the highway and called out:

"Hello, strangers! It's a wonder you wouldn't take possession of the whole road! How long have you been in this part of the country?"

"Just lit!" answered Ben. "Come on in," he added with a chuckle. "We'll make way for you. We don't own this road."

Indeed it was necessary to shift the great planes of the *Ann* before the ranger could ride up to where the boys stood.

"You've got some fine machines there!" the ranger commented.

"You bet we have!" answered Ben.

"Are those the machines that have been racing about in the air all day?" asked the ranger.

"We haven't been in the air all day," replied Carl, "but I reckon the *Bertha* and the *Ann* have been doing considerable flying."

"And there's been something of a ruction over at Monterey about a machine, too," said the ranger.

The boys were all attention in an instant.

"Whose machine was it?" asked Carl.

"That's what they don't know," answered the ranger. "A man who claimed to come from New York dropped in a big machine early this morning and went to bed at a hotel. In an hour or two a couple of Japs claimed the machine and induced an officer to help them get it away."

"Did you hear any of the names?" asked Ben.

"Havens, the man's name was," replied the ranger.

"Well," Ben said, "that's the name of the man who owns this big machine."

"Where is Havens now?" asked Carl.

"My informant stated that he was in jail!" replied the ranger.

"Jail?" demanded Ben. "What for?"

"It seems that this man Havens and a friend of his beat up a deputy sheriff, and the hotel detective, and shook up a hotel clerk like a rat."

"Then why didn't they give him a chance to pay a fine and let him go?" demanded Carl.

"Perhaps he hasn't got money enough with him to pay the fines which may be imposed."

"Money enough with him!" shouted Carl scornfully. "Louis Havens could buy the whole town of Monterey, and then have money enough left to make your state debt look like thirty cents!"

"Is this Havens the noted millionaire aviator?" asked the ranger.

"That's the man!" Carl declared. "And he'll do something to those folks back there in Monterey before he gets done with them, too!"

"I hope he will!" replied the ranger heartily.

The boys now turned their attention to the machines, and were soon ready for flight.

"Where are you going?" asked the ranger.

"Where should we be going but to Monterey?" asked Carl.

"Look here, boys," the ranger began, "my name is Gilmore. I'm chief ranger of this district, and I know the officers at Monterey are not the kind of people you seem to think they are. Now, if you don't mind carrying me, I'll leave my pony in a little shack over the hill and go with you to Monterey."

"Will you?" shouted Ben eagerly.

"That'll be fine!" declared Carl.

"Of course you can get Havens out of jail?" asked Ben.

"Of course I can," replied Gilmore. "Unless there is a charge of murder or some other felony

against the man, something which will require the action of the county court, I can get him out of that country pen in about three minutes."

"If you do," laughed Carl, "Havens will fix you up all right! He's got a pull with the department at Washington, and he never forgets a friend."

Gilmore rode his horse away to the little shack which he had mentioned and then hastened back to the *Ann*. In five minutes all were aboard, Gilmore riding on the Havens machine with Ben.

"Can you drive an aeroplane?" asked Ben.

"I surely can," answered Gilmore, almost screaming the answer in the boy's ear. "I had a year's experience at the game."

Ben nodded in appreciation of the information and turned on full speed, traveling in the direction of Monterey.

An hour later the *Ann*, accompanied by the *Bertha*, settled down on the field at Monterey from which she had been so lawlessly abducted that very morning. It was evident that the town was still excited over the incidents of the day, for the minute the flying machines appeared in the sky there was a rush for the open field.

Among the first to approach Gilmore and the boys as they stepped from the machines was the red-faced deputy sheriff who had received Stroup's fistic attention earlier in the day. He approached the boys swaggeringly but hesitated a moment when

he saw Gilmore's uniform. However, he kept his ground and glared at the boys angrily.

"Where did you get this machine?" he demanded, pointing to the *Ann.*

"Where did you get those black eyes and that red nose?" returned Carl. "You look as if somebody had been taking a punch at you!"

The deputy stroked the injured members sympathetically and took a step toward the boy. Gilmore blocked his passage.

"Perhaps you can tell me!" shouted the deputy.

"Tell you what?" asked Gilmore.

"Where these school-boys got this machine. Only a few hours ago I delivered it to the owners from whom it had been stolen."

"Yes, you did!" replied Ben. "You delivered it to a couple of thieving Japs! That's what you did!"

"Where is the owner of the machine now?" asked Gilmore.

"You ought to know if you got the machine of him," returned the deputy.

"I refer to the man who brought the machine to town," said Gilmore, coolly. "I asked about Louis Havens, the millionaire aviator."

The deputy swung his fists wildly in the air and his face became, if possible, redder than before.

"You can't fool me with any stories about millionaire aviators!" he shouted. "The ruffian who

assaulted me and brought a stolen aeroplane to town is in jail, where he ought to be."

"Did Havens assault you?" asked the ranger.

"He caused it to be done," was the hot answer. "I saw him wink at the man, and then the man struck me on the nose."

"And you've got a peach of a nose at that!" laughed Carl.

The deputy grabbed at the boy, but Gilmore stood in the way.

"If I had a nose like that," yelled Ben, "I'd go off and sit in the dark and let it rest."

"Do you know these fresh boys, Mr. Gilmore?" asked the deputy.

"They came from New York with Louis Havens," was the reply.

"I don't believe that man we've got in jail is Louis Havens at all!" yelled the deputy.

"Who is in jail with him?" asked Ben.

"Stroup the garage man," was the reply. "He's got four cases of assault and battery against him, and the man you call Havens is charged with stealing this machine."

Just then a muscular, determined-looking man, trousers in boots and wearing a cowboy hat, approached the group, now continually increasing in size.

"Hello Sheriff Chase!" exclaimed Gilmore stepping forward.

"The sight of you sure is good for sore eyes!" returned the sheriff shaking Gilmore warmly by the hand.

After the two officers had exchanged greetings and talked for a few moments in low tones, the sheriff turned to his deputy.

"Pass over your badge and gun!" he said.

"I acted entirely within my rights," whined the other, doing as requested.

"You acted like a fool!" replied the sheriff. "You've rendered your bondsmen and myself liable to heavy damages for your fool actions this morning. How much did the Japs give you for what you did for them?"

The deputy mumbled out some indistinct reply and turned away, followed by the jeers of the crowd.

"That settles that part of the case," said Sheriff Chase with a smile. "Now I'll deputize half a dozen trusty men to look after the machines while we go and have a talk with Havens."

Half an hour later Havens and Stroup, trying to make the best of prison life by repeating their experiences of the morning, saw Ben and Carl come running toward the grated window.

"Ah, there!" Ben shouted seizing an upright bar in each hand and pressing his nose in between the two. "I always had my suspicions about you, Mr. Havens!"

"Doesn't he look handsome in there!" shouted Carl, putting his hands on Ben's shoulders and leaping up so as to get a better view.

"Glad to see you, you little rascals," said Havens. "Have you got a ship I can ride in?" he asked. "I've gone and lost the *Ann!*"

"And we've found it!" yelled Ben. "And here's Sheriff Chase and Ranger Gilmore who'll have you out of there in about a minute."

In less than half an hour the details of release were all completed, although Havens found it necessary to pay three pretty stiff fines for Stroup. However, the sheriff immediately appointed the garage man as deputy in place of the one removed, so his standing in the community was not at all injured by the experiences of the morning.

"And now," Ben said as they walked away toward the *Ann*, "we've still got troubles of our own! Jimmie and Kit are lost in the air somewhere, and the outlaws are after them—hot blocks."

CHAPTER XX.

STEALING AN AEROPLANE.

After a long time Jimmie had his bear steak, potatoes and coffee set before the men whom he believed to be the burglars who had been chased across the continent. The two sat down and ate with an appetite, while the boys were not at all slow in consuming large sections of bear.

"This is a queer world, ain't it?" laughed Kit after disposing of a large steak. "Mighty queer world, ain't it!"

"What's the Solomon, now?" asked Jimmie, while Phillips and Mendosa looked up interestedly.

"Well," the boy answered, "not so very long ago this bear was sitting under a Sycamore tree thinking what a nice boy steak he was going to have for dinner. Now, I'm sitting out here by a cosy little fire thinking what a nice bear steak I've just had for dinner."

"I don't think the bear had much of a chance of getting his boy dinner," Phillips suggested.

"Your friends would have rescued you in a short time if I had not put in my appearance."

"Anyhow," Kit went on, with boyish gravity, notwithstanding the twinkle in his eyes, "the bear and I have buried all hard feelings. At least I've buried about two pounds of it right now."

During the remainder of the afternoon the two guests devoted most of their time to talking to each other in low asides, and to asking questions of the two boys. They wanted to know exactly what the aviator had said regarding the chief ranger, and especially what had been said concerning a stay of two or three days farther south.

It was very plain to Jimmie that the outlaws had not as yet been communicated with by either one of the two desperadoes sent on from New York. In fact, the pursuers seemed to have had uncommonly hard luck.

The one referred to by the boys as the monkey-faced man, the one who had chased Jimmie up New York bay, had smashed his machine and broken his arm, so he was entirely out of the race before reaching the Rocky Mountains.

The other aviator, the one described as the blond brute, had made successful progress across the continent only to have his motor go wrong during the chase of the afternoon. Jimmie was not much inclined to throw boquets at himself, but he chuckled at the thought that only for his success in keeping

the blond aviator amused the two outlaws might at that moment have been beyond the reach of the officers.

"And here they sit," Jimmie chuckled to himself, "waiting for Ben and Carl to come back, or waiting for some officer to drop down and give them the pinch!"

There is an old saying that one must not count chickens before they are hatched, which Jimmie at that moment seemed to have overlooked. While he was complimenting himself on coaxing the outlaws into their present danger, the outlaws themselves were conferring as to what advantage they could take of the situation in which they found themselves.

"It's just this way," Mendosa was saying in a low tone to Phillips. "The whole country is astir over the smuggling going on, and will be full of officers in no time. Even if the police do not come here to get us, it is not improbable that they will blunder into our camp some night and lug us away as suspicious characters."

"What ought we to do then?" asked Phillips.

"We ought to get out," Mendosa replied. "Why, even the forest rangers are coming down here looking for you. I never did think it was good sense for you to wear that uniform."

"Now don't kick!" snarled Phillips.

"It's enough to make a man kick!" Mendosa

declared. "Here we thought we had a neat little home for the next three months, with no one aware of our presence here, and no danger of going hungry. But just look what we're up against at this moment! I wish we could get one of the steamers that come up here with smuggled Chinks."

"Much good that would do!" sneered Phillips.

"That's what you say to all my suggestions," Mendosa snarled.

"Then talk sense!" demanded Phillips.

"How's this for sense, then?" asked Mendosa. "Suppose we disappear in that flying machine as soon as it gets dark."

"Can you run it?" asked Phillips, scornfully.

"Of course not!" was the answer. "I can run a faro lay-out, but I can't run an aeroplane."

"Then where is the sense in the suggestion?"

"The boy can run it!" declared Mendoza.

"Yes, but will he?"

"Will he?" repeated Mendoza. "Let me get a knife next to his ribs and he'll do anything I tell him to do!"

"But will the machine carry us two and the boys?"

"The boys?" scorned Mendoza. "We don't have to take both boys with us! We can cut the kid's throat and leave him in the bushes!"

"I wouldn't like to do that," Phillips said, hesitatingly.

"You wouldn't, eh?" demanded Mendoza. "Who struck the watchman?"

"I didn't!" replied Phillips.

"Yes, you did!" sneered the other. "Now, I'll tell you what we'll do," he went on. "Just as soon as it becomes dark, we'll settle the kid's case and mount the machine with the other one. There are only two seats, but I'll hold him in my lap, so I can embroider his back with my knife if he don't do exactly as I tell him to. After he gets us out of the country, way down into lower California, we'll drop the machine, boy and all into the ocean."

"I'm a burglar but not a murderer!" insisted Phillips.

"Unless we do something," Mendoza exclaimed, "you won't be either a burglar or a murderer. You'll be a corpse. For my part, I have no inclinations toward New York and the electric chair."

"It may not be necessary for us to injure the boy," Phillips suggested.

"May not be necessary?" repeated Mendoza. "If we go away and leave the kid here, he'll chase over the hills until he finds some one to tell what we've done and which way we've gone. If we leave this boy, Jimmie, flying about in his machine, he'll never rest until he tells the officers where he left us, and all about us. In order to protect ourselves, we've got to keep them quiet. Are you going to weaken now?"

"I'll do whatever is necessary when the time comes," replied Phillips.

Mendoza seemed satisfied with this, and the two men walked back to the fire and, notwithstanding the treachery in their hearts, engaged in friendly conversation with the boys.

Between that time and dark they brought out their bear steak again and clumsily broiled great slices over the fire. They also cut large quantities of bread into slices and made sandwiches. They even made large quantities of coffee and bottled it up in milk jars with patent tops in which the boys had brought a supply of the lacteal fluid.

The boys regarded them curiously as these liberties were taken with their provisions, but Phillips explained that he had many miles to travel during the next two days, and would not be within reach of his base of supplies. Mendoza was not so careful to quiet the suspicions of the lads, and his brusqueness was one of the things which put them on their guard.

"Those fellows are getting ready to jump out!" Jimmie insisted as he walked away from the fire with his chum.

"Well, we can't help it if they do start away!" Kit responded.

"We might shoot," Jimmie went on, "but that is a game two can play at, and it might not be a profitable one for us."

"I wouldn't like to do that, anyway," said Kit.

"I've got a notion," Jimmie went on, "that these fellows want to get away in the machine to-night. They probably believe the story I told about the chief ranger, but, still, they doubtless want to beat it while the beating is good."

"I don't believe they can run the machine," argued Kit.

"I don't believe they can, either," answered Jimmie. "But they know that I can," he added significantly.

"They wouldn't take you along!" Kit replied.

"They would take me along while they could use me," answered Jimmie, "and that would be the last of yours truly. Those fellows are cold-blooded murderers! I wish the other boys would come!"

"I'm afraid something has happened to them," Kit replied soberly.

Twilight fell as the outlaws planned murder and the boys planned capture. As the latest finger of light touched a summit to the southwest an aeroplane was seen slowly moving toward the valley. It was plain even to the outlaws that she was seriously crippled. As for the boys, they watched her interestedly until a mass of clouds from the ocean settled down over the mountain top and shut her from view.

"That's the fellow that give us the run to-day!" laughed Jimmie.

"You mean the man who told you about the chief ranger?" asked Phillips.

"The same," answered the boy noticing at the same time with deep satisfaction the alarm in the other's face.

"He couldn't give any one a chase now," Kit exclaimed. "Because he's limping along like an old woman with a crutch!"

"He's probably got a poor spark plug," Jimmie commented.

There were a good many furtive glances passed by both parties as the outlaws began to prepare for the night. They were given a shelter-tent by Jimmie, and saw fit to place it within a short distance of the *Louise*. The tent to be occupied by the boys was put up not far away. More wood was put on the fire as the darkness grew. The outlaws understood that they would need light in order to execute the wicked purpose in hand.

Jimmie and Kit promised each other that they would not close their eyes in slumber even for a minute, but the day had been a hard one and presently Jimmie dozed off. Kit was still awake, but was inclined to let his chum sleep as long as he could keep his own eyes open.

"There's no use in both of us keeping awake," the small boy thought. "I can just as well watch those fellows. Anyway, if Jimmie has the situation sized up correctly, they won't go away with-

out letting us know," he continued with a grim smile.

This reasoning was all very well on the part of the boy, but in five minutes he was sound asleep himself.

It was ten o'clock before the outlaws emerged stealthily from their tent. There was no moon as yet, although there would be one later on, but the light of the stars was quite sufficient for them to look over the entire valley in which the *Louise* lay.

Once beyond the circle of fire they could see quite distinctly up to the rim of the thicket at the sides of the bowl. They conferred together for a moment, and then Mendoza crouched down on the ground, drawing Phillips with him and drew a revolver.

"What is it?" asked Phillips.

"There, at the edge of the thicket!" replied Mendoza. "There is some one creeping along the ground!"

"It's a dream!" declared Phillips.

At that moment the figure of a man left the underbrush and crept cautiously down toward the fire. The outlaws secreted themselves in the shadows and watched him. He hesitated for a moment, just at the rim of the firelight, apparently listening for some indication of wakefulness in the tents, then he moved straight to the collection of provisions which

had been prepared, and a portion of which had been left in view.

"Guess it's some hungry tramp," suggested Phillips.

"Is it?" replied Mendoza. "Just look again! That's Graybill from New York. Look at the big shoulders and the blond head of him!"

As Mendoza ceased speaking he gave a low whistle which the approaching man seemed to understand, for he straightened out of his stooping position and approached the provisions with confidence. In a moment he was greedily devouring meat sandwiches and drinking cold coffee, while Phillips and Mendoza were explaining the situation to him.

"Who's in the shelter-tents?" he asked in a moment, and Phillips explained. "They're nervy little foxes!" was Graybill's only comment."

The three men talked together for perhaps ten minutes, during which the provisions were being stored away on the *Louise*. Graybill stood looking inquiringly into the air most of the time, while his companions were so occupied.

"It may be a bad night," he said after a while, "and yet it may be a good one; but I'm willing to take the risk if you are. As I've told you, my machine is pretty well smashed, but I think the *Louise* will carry us all if we take good care of her.

"She's got to carry us all!" insisted Mendoza.

Graybill walked cautiously over to the shelter-tent where Jimmie and Kit were still sound asleep and looked in at the sleeping boys with a smile on his hard face.

"The little scamps!" he exclaimed. "They're hardly larger than peanuts, yet they gave me a run to-day that many a trained aviator wouldn't be able to manage."

"Mendoza was thinking of quieting the boys for good and all before leaving," Phillips suggested, rather suspecting what the answer of the aviator would be.

"Nothing doing!" said Graybill. "If he touches the boys, I'll duck him into the first canyon we come to. They're gritty little chaps, and I'm not going to see them harmed!"

"I knew what your decision would be," said Phillips, "and that's why I mentioned the matter to you. I don't want to see the boys injured."

"They won't be!" declared Graybill.

Mendoza now approached the two, declaring that the provisions were all packed on the *Louise,* and that they were ready to take their departure.

"All we've got to do now," he went on, "is to fix these boys so they won't run out and tell tales after we're gone!"

"Nothing doing!" exclaimed Graybill, and Mendoza turned away sullenly.

A few moments later, when Jimmie and Kit were

awakened by the clatter of the *Louise's* motors, they crawled sleepily out of their shelter-tent and looked up into the starry sky.

"That's a joke on us!" Jimmie said.

"Yes," Kit admitted. "We didn't understand that they could operate the machine themselves, so we went to sleep. Now we've lost the murderers and what's worse, we have lost the *Louise!*"

"And the *Bertha,*" added Jimmie, "and Ben, and Carl, and Mr. Havens, and the whole bunch!"

CHAPTER XXI.

STROUP'S INSTRUCTIONS.

"How comes it that Jimmie and Kit are lost in the air?" asked Havens, as, accompanied by the sheriff and the forest ranger, Gilmore, the boys walked away from the jail.

"It's the most unaccountable thing!" Ben exclaimed almost impatiently. "We left Jimmie to watch the machines while we slept, and the first thing we knew he was up in the air, and Kit with him."

"He may have returned to the camp by this time," suggested Havens.

"If he has, I hope he'll guard the *Louise* better than we guarded the *Bertha!*" Carl put in.

"What happened to the *Bertha?*" the millionaire asked.

Then Ben told the story of the visit of the Chinaman who had wasted their gasoline and eaten their provisions so ravenously. He also told the story of the landing on the summit, and of the visit of the two Japs in the *Ann.* Havens looked grave.

"Those Japs," he exclaimed, "must have come directly on from New York to Monterey. They are well-known East Side crooks, and are using their old tactics here."

"Well, they probably went away after Phillips and Mendoza in that limping old machine," Carl said. "They can't go far."

Gilmore and Sheriff Chase, who had listened intently to the conversation, now began asking questions.

"You spoke of a Chinaman coming to your tent," Gilmore began, "as if Mr. Havens already knew of the existence of such a party. What about that? When and where did you first see this Chinaman?" he added turning to Ben. "Tell me all about it."

At this time the little party was directly in front of the hotel where Stroup had exhibited his muscular ability. As Ben explained about the first stopping-place, the two beacons, the schooner, the caves, and the swarm of Celestials, Gilmore drew him into the hotel and into the smoking room. Here he seated the entire party notwithstanding the frowns of the clerk, and closed and locked the door.

"Do you know," he asked, after a moment's thought, "that you boys have made a discovery which is likely to bring you a large amount of money?"

"I guess they can use it, all right," laughed

Havens. "They want a new flying machine every time they see a new model!"

"Tell us about it?" asked Ben eagerly.

"Well," Gilmore went on, "we have been after those Chink smugglers a long time. The beacons have been observed night after night, and schooners have long been known to visit Monterey bay during the dark hours, but," he went on, "we have searched the coast for a hundred miles and never found anything like the canyon you blundered into the first night of your arrival."

"And we found it in the dark!" laughed Carl.

"Cheer up!" exclaimed Gilmore. "My men couldn't find it in the day-time."

"Well, you know where to get the Chinks now!" the sheriff broke in.

"But how about this Chink we were talking about?" asked Ben. "We found him tied up like a side roast of beef. We turned him loose, of course, and then he comes and serves us a dirty trick like that!"

Gilmore sat back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"That Chinaman," he said after a time, "is not a Chinaman at all! That's Sloan, the Washington secret service man!"

"But he looks like a Chink!" insisted Carl.

"Certainly," answered Gilmore. "That's why he has been assigned to this class of work."

"Can he talk like a Chink?" asked Ben.

"As natural as life!" was the reply.

"Well, he don't know much English," grinned Ben, "if you leave it to me. All he said was 'Savvy you, alle same' and 'No can do!'"

Again Gilmore broke into a roar of laughter.

"That's one of his old tricks," he said. "He's so stuck on his make-up and his pidgin English that he seeks to keep up the deception when there's no need of it."

"Then we ought to know why they tied him up!" Ben declared.

"It's easy enough to guess," Gilmore answered. "He tried to play in with the crowd of smugglers and Chinks, and was detected and tied up."

This from the sheriff, who was making notes in a memorandum book as the talk went on:

"It's a wonder they didn't kill him!"

"They probably would have killed him in a very short time," Gilmore replied to the sheriff, "if the boys hadn't put in an appearance."

"Then we saved one life, anyway!" laughed Carl.

"But why did he come and waste our gasoline?" demanded Ben.

"I can't answer that," replied Gilmore. "You probably will see him before you get out of the country, and then you can get the explanation from him. He'll tell you, easy enough."

"I think I can give a pretty good guess at it right now," the sheriff broke in. "Sloan possibly had his own idea as to what the boys were here for, and that idea was undoubtedly incorrect."

"I've got it now!" cried Carl. "I know all about it!"

"You're the wise boy!" laughed Ben. "Go on and tell it."

"Why, don't you see," Carl went on, "Sloan suspected us of coming here to butt in on his game with the smugglers? He saw us in the cavern, and of course believed that we were there working for the immense rewards offered for the criminals. He wanted to head us off!"

"That may be right," replied Gilmore. "The fellow is mercenary enough, when it comes down to cases. Well," the forest ranger went on, "what else could the fellow think? He saw you there in the cave, and knew that you knew the use it was being put to. The only way that he could figure it out was that you were there to interfere with a game which he had almost won by playing a lone hand."

"And so he dumped our gasoline to keep us from flying back to the canyon or flying over to Monterey to tell what we'd discovered!" suggested Carl.

"That is undoubtedly correct," Gilmore admitted, "and if the *Louise* had been there, he doubtless would have crippled her, too."

"And now," laughed Havens, "that you have the whole thing settled, without Sloan knowing anything about it, perhaps we'd better go somewhere and have dinner, or supper, or whatever you may call it."

"We probably can't get anything here at this time of day," the sheriff interposed, "but I know of a restaurant down the street where we can get anything from a lobster to an elephant's ear."

"I don't care about spending any money in this place, anyway," said Havens. "Say, Sheriff," he went on, "I want to leave with you a little present for your new deputy Stroup. Will you deliver it to him just as I hand it to you without one word of explanation?"

"Surely," replied the official.

Havens took a note-book from his pocket, tore out a blank leaf, wrote three words on it and signed his name. Then he took a bank-note of the denomination of one thousand dollars from his pocket, folded it up in the paper, stuffed the whole into a hotel envelope which he sealed and passed it over to the sheriff, who took it with evident amazement.

"You don't do things by halves," the official observed.

"I try to do things according to my means," replied Havens. "I should have missed a lot of

satisfaction this morning if Stroup hadn't shown up with his capable fists!"

"What did you write on the sheet of paper?" asked Carl.

Havens looked at the sheriff and the forest ranger with a smile.

"You won't arrest me for inciting a riot, will you?" he asked.

"You've already paid too many fines in this town," laughed the sheriff.

"Well, under promise of immunity, then," Havens went on, "the words were 'Hit him again.' How does that strike you?"

"If you had showed the paper to me before you sealed it up," the sheriff laughed, "I would have added my name to yours at the bottom of the instructions."

"Do you really think he will hit him again?" asked Carl.

"Hit him again?" repeated the sheriff, "He'll hit the clerk, and the ex-deputy, and the house detective, until he drives them out of town, and pay his fine out of the thousand dollars."

"Don't you let him do that," advised Havens. "If he just gives each of them a good licking once, that'll be sufficient. There are too many fresh hotel clerks and deputy sheriffs in the world, also house detectives, and if he reduced the list by three, that'll be enough."

"Holy Smoke!" shouted Carl rising to his feet and making for the door. "Are we going to talk here all day without anything to eat?"

"I'm so empty right now," Ben decided, "that you could hold a Salvation Army meeting in my system. Where's this restaurant where you can get an elephant's ear?"

"I'll lead you to it," laughed the sheriff, "and while we're eating, we can lay plans for the capture of that gang of smugglers."

"We didn't come here after smugglers," suggested Ben.

"Not so you could notice it," Carl went on. "We came here to find the burglars of the Buyers' Bank in New York. We haven't found them yet."

"But we know pretty well where they are," Ben insisted. "Kit saw Phillips in the woods this morning, dressed in a ranger's uniform."

The story of the bear was new to Havens and the officers, and they enjoyed its relation immensely. Both boys smacked their lips at thought of the bear steak they didn't get.

"We can get the outlaws with little trouble now," Gilmore said, after a moment's reflection. "I've got men enough in this vicinity to put a line all around the hills. So long as we know they are here, we are all right."

"After we eat dinner," Ben suggested, "perhaps we'd better go back to the green bowl and look up

Jimmie and Kit. There's no knowing what they may have discovered during the day."

"That's the idea!" exclaimed Havens. "And now for a good feed."

Before the meal at the restaurant was finished an interruption which materially changed the plans of the whole party, took place. It was Sloan, the secret service man, who blundered into the party with a broken head who sidetracked the old plans.

CHAPTER XXII.

UNDER THE MOONLIGHT.

"Now there goes the loss of a lot of endeavor!" Jimmie exclaimed, as the *Louise* lifted into the air.

"What's the answer?" asked Kit with a grin.

"Do you know who's aboard of that machine?" Jimmie demanded in a sarcastic tone.

"Two outlaws who're carrying away our good bear meat!" replied Kit.

"And do you know who's doing the aviation stunt?" continued Jimmie.

"Answer in two weeks!" replied the boy with a snicker.

"Well, I'll tell you who it is," almost shouted Jimmie. "It's probably that blond brute we spent so much time amusing to-day."

"How do you know that, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?" asked Kit.

"Didn't we see his machine staggering over the summit some time ago?" demanded Jimmie. "You know we did."

"But that was a long ways from here," Kit advised.

"Oh, what's the use?" exclaimed Jimmie. "His machine fluttered down into some hole not far away from here, and he saw our fire and came forward to get something to eat."

"I half believe you're right," Kit admitted.

"Of course, I'm right!" insisted Jimmie. "The blond brute is the only aviator in this section that I know of who would have taken the outlaws away. That's the duck, all right."

"Then we lose?" asked Kit.

"We lose if the outlaws are sharp enough to get away before morning," Jimmie went on. "They certainly know now what we're here for.

"Yes, and the information we've been trying to keep from them all this time is now in their possession," added Jimmie in a disgusted tone.

"It's a good thing they didn't have it before they left us asleep in the shelter tent," Kit suggested.

"Why do you say that?" asked Jimmie.

"Because, if they had known, we wouldn't be here now."

"What next?" asked Kit in a minute. "What are we going to do about it? We ought to do something right away."

"I suggest," Jimmie answered, "that we take our searchlights and our guns and go out and find that third machine."

"And chase up the outlaws?" demanded Kit.

"That's the idea," Jimmie answered.

"Chase the *Louise* in that slow old ice wagon that we went by this afternoon like it was anchored?" demanded the boy.

"The machine is all right if properly handled," Jimmie insisted.

"But you saw how it staggered around the summit," argued Kit. "I don't want to trust my bones in any such old contraption."

"It's oranges to oats," Jimmie exclaimed, "that a new spark plug will put that machine in pretty good shape. Of course we can't hope to keep up with the *Louise* on a long chase, but I don't believe there'll be any long chase to-night. The outlaws will settle down in some nook and remain there until morning. All we'll have to do to-night will be to locate them. We ought to be able to do that."

"Say," said Kit with a grin, "I wish you'd find an air boat somewhere and row me back to Robinson's barn. I used to have a good flop now and then when I lived there, but since I've been with you boys, it's been a night and day job."

"You're getting fat over it," Jimmie insisted.

"Sailing up in the air after a bunch like that won't put fat on any one's ribs," Kit continued. "They'll see our lights, and we might as well try to sleuth out a moonshiner with a brass band."

"Come on, you little monkey," urged Jimmie.

"We'll go and find the machine anyhow. We'll see what shape she's in before we decide."

Throwing more wood on the fire in order to illuminate the bowl as much as possible, the boys started away. Before they had proceeded far a glimmer of light in a thicket almost at the lip of the bowl attracted their attention. It was a very brilliant light, but seemed to be shining through a small aperture.

"Acetylene!" exclaimed Jimmie as the boys drew nearer. "That's the acetylene lamp on that old machine. Our blond friend forgot to turn it off. Now wasn't that kind of him!"

"I guess he was about all in," Kit advised. "We gave him a mighty swift chase, and he seems to have kept in the air a long time after we quit. They probably fed him up on some of our good provisions so he felt better before he went away."

"Of course they did!" laughed Jimmie. "Did you notice how those fellows laid into our bread and butter?"

Jimmie began a systematic examination of the machine. He found the gasoline tanks nearly full, which indicated that the blond aviator had traveled to some filling station after the conclusion of the race.

So far as Jimmie could see, the aeroplane was in perfect condition except that the spark plugs were badly worn and cracked.

"Can we use them?" asked Kit. "The spark plugs, I mean."

"They're no good," replied Jimmie, "but we've got plenty at the camp. Ben wanted to keep them stored in the boxes under the seats, but I sneaked some out when we landed in the green bowl and put them away by the pile of tenting. Good thing I did, too."

"If you hadn't, they would be on board the *Louise* right now," Kit said, "and we would be without any."

"You chase back to camp and bring the plugs," Jimmie directed, "and I'll stay here and look the machine over once more. Hurry back, for we want to get up in the air in time to see the lights of the *Louise*."

"They must be pretty far away by this time," suggested Kit.

"Yes, we can go up far enough to see for fifty miles on each side!" Jimmie said. "They can't be fifty miles away by this time."

Kit hastened away to the camp, and soon returned with the spark plugs. In a very short time the machine was pulled out of the little depression in which the wheels lay and drawn down to a level which would permit of a flight. It was by no means as large as either the *Louise* or the *Bertha* but a strong aeroplane for all that.

"Now," Jimmie suggested. "We ought to go

and see if there's anything left to eat here, and take it away with us if there is."

"You can't get the smell of that bear steak out of your nostrils, can you?" laughed Kit.

"But just think who gave it to us?" Jimmie grinned.

After packing away provisions enough for a meal or two the boys put the machine into the air and lifted slowly out of the bowl.

The air was comparatively still, and a mass of clouds hung low over the mountains. Looking out into the darkness, the boys could see no sign of light anywhere. Their own lights were sheltered as much as possible, but they knew that they might be seen a great distance. Kit proposed putting out the acetylene lights entirely, but Jimmie insisted that it was so dark they might bump into a mountain without seeing it!

"Much good that short space of light would do us," Kit replied. "We'd be into the rocks almost before the light struck them."

"Then we'll go slower and higher up," Jimmie declared.

The machine continued to rise until a faint radiance began to seep through the heavy clouds with which the boys were surrounded. In another minute the stars shone down upon them, and the field of mist lay far below.

Jimmie had frequently looked out upon such

scenes before, but to Kit it was all very wonderful. The clouds below looked like waves rolling and tossing on a summer sea. As far as the eye could reach there were only the white undulations which shut out the light of the stars from below.

The boys were going very slowly now, lifting with every yard traveled and watching intently for the lights of the *Louise*.

Presently they came to a break in the field of clouds below and looked down upon the surging waters of the Pacific ocean. They had no idea that they were so far to the west, but Jimmie took advantage of the incident to look down upon the southern promontory off which the schooner had stood on the previous night.

The beacon was still there and the schooner was still there. In a moment the clouds closed in again and the boys moved away to the east.

The boys circled about for an hour or more, and then, weary of remaining so long in one position, dropped down to a peak which, far above the clouds, glimmered in the light of the rising moon.

"We can see from here just as well as from the seats," Kit suggested, "and we may as well get all the rest we can."

"I've got an idea," Jimmie answered, "that we ought to go to the south, but I'm going to break this for once and stay right here. We're not far from the home of the smugglers, and, on the theory that

thieves flock together, our outlaws ought to be in the vicinity."

"That suits me," Kit answered. "I'm dead tired."

"If we hadn't gone to sleep to-night," mourned Jimmie, "We wouldn't be here now. That nap just spoiled everything."

"What could we have done if we had remained awake?" Kit demanded. "When that blond brute arrived, we'd have got our heads knocked off and that's about all."

"In just a little while now," Jimmie declared, "I'm going to trail over to Monterey and see if I can find any trace of Mr. Havens or the boys. It's just rotten the way Ben and Carl are staying away!"

As soon as the boy finished speaking, Kit grabbed him by the arm and pointed to the west.

"There's your light!" he said.

The light referred to sat on a peak some distance to the west, very near to the sheer descent into the Pacific, in fact, and was slightly lower than the one upon which the boys had rested. It was, however, above the clouds and the moon, pushing her way through the mists, shone full upon the shining planes of a flying machine.

Only one artificial light was in sight, and that appeared to come from the aeroplane lamp stationed just above the seats.

"That's the *Louise,* all right enough!" exclaimed Jimmie. "Now I wonder what they are staying there for! It seems to me that they ought to be getting out of this country just as fast as gasoline can carry them."

"There's something exciting going on over there!" Kit exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LOOK AT THE BOWL.

The interruption which came at the restaurant during the meal Ben and Carl were having with Mr. Havens and the two officers, was, to the boys at least, a most astonishing one.

When Sloan entered the restaurant, his head wrapped in a great bandage, the boys, of course, recognized him as the man who had played the part of a Chinaman so cleverly. After the explanations made by the two officers, Sloan would have been recognized in any event, but the boys would have known him if they had had no information on the subject.

His resemblance to a Chinaman was, indeed, striking. Indeed, it was claimed by many who knew and disliked him that he really was a Chinaman.

As he entered the restaurant Sloan beckoned to Gilmore, and the two conferred together a short time at a separate table.

The boys saw that Gilmore was very much inter-

ested in the revelations being made by Sloan, and they also saw that the detective was very weak.

By the time the conference was ended the meal had been completed, and Gilmore returned to his friends while Sloan hastened away in the care of a deputy sheriff who had been summoned to the restaurant.

"This visit appears to make a change of plan necessary," Gilmore said, as the five walked away from the restaurant. "We have some talking to do, so we may as well go to my office, where we can talk without danger of being overheard.

All were, of course, very anxious to know the result of the interview between the chief ranger and the detective, but they asked no questions, and Gilmore said nothing until they were seated in the private office of a suite of rooms set aside for the sheriff.

"As you all saw," Gilmore began, "Sloan is all in. He was attacked by a number of smugglers not very long ago and barely escaped with his life."

"Served him right!" muttered Ben. "He's the guy that spilled our gasoline! I wish they'd beaten him up more."

"Now," continued Gilmore, "the story told by you boys concerning the smugglers' headquarters was repeated to me by Sloan with only a few variations. He has located the place where the Chinks are hidden until they can be safely run into the

cities, and has spotted several of the leaders, including the captain of one of the schooners which frequently appears off the south beacon."

"We came pretty near doing all that!" Carl laughed.

"Now, what he wants us to do," Gilmore continued, "is to station a force of men around a summit from which all that goes on below may be watched. He says that if we reach the place between midnight and morning we will see Chinks rowed ashore from the schooner and passed into the caves the boys penetrated."

"That listens good to me!" said the sheriff. "I've long been aching to get my hands on those smugglers!"

"He says, too," continued Gilmore, "that large quantities of opium are stored in the caves, He wants me to take a force large enough to surround the whole district and do the job at one blow."

"Do you think that a good idea?" asked the sheriff.

"I do not!" was Gilmore's reply. "In the first place, we can't get men in there to-night. In the next place, if we could, we couldn't station them without alarming the outlaws."

"That's just my idea," the sheriff said.

"Perhaps," Mr. Havens suggested, "we might reach that point in the airships. It isn't a very long journey, according to what Ben says."

"That's just what I was about to suggest," Gilmore explained. "How many people will the two ships you have here carry?"

"They will carry six, on a pinch," was the reply. "The small persons would, of course, have to travel on the *Bertha.*"

Havens stepped to the window and looked out.

"We were thinking of looking up Jimmie and Kit," he said, "but it's getting dark now, and we never could find them in this tangle of hills unless they were up in the air with lights burning."

"I'll tell you what we can do," Ben observed. "The sheriff and the ranger can go in the *Ann* with you, Mr. Havens, and Carl and I can switch around over the place where we had our camp and see if there are any signs of the boys."

"That will do nicely," Mr. Havens replied.

"Now, see here," the sheriff interrupted. "There are only two of you boys, both light weights, and the machine, you say, will carry three. Is that right? Why not take Stroup along with us?"

"Sure!" Ben exclaimed. "I'd like to have that fellow go with us. I've heard what he did to three people here to-day, and I think he'd prove a pretty good friend in a hot scrap!"

"I'll send out for him," the sheriff promised, "and in the meantime, we'll all keep pretty close in the office."

"That's a good idea," suggested Gilmore. "There's no knowing how many friends the smugglers have in this town. I would suggest, however," he went on, "that some one go out and look over the two machines."

"The machines are all right," the sheriff assured the others. "There are six deputies out there now in charge of Stroup, and he sent in a report not long ago. The crowd has been hustled off the field, and everything out there is as quiet as a prohibition convention."

"What time ought we to start?" asked Ben, like all boys, eager to be away. "I'm actually getting anxious to be off."

"We can make the distance in half an hour, if we are obliged to," replied Havens, "unless I'm greatly mistaken in the location of the promontory. So we ought not to leave here until about midnight."

"It will be dark as a stack of black cats!" exclaimed Carl looking out of the window at the sky.

"There's plenty of room above the clouds!" smiled Havens.

"Never thought of that!" exclaimed Ben. "We were above the clouds in Mexico once, but that seems a long time ago now."

"And there will be a moon about midnight, too," Gilmore explained, "so we can see everything above the clouds quite distinctly."

"Huh!" grinned Carl, "we can't look through the clouds at the schooner and the Chinks, can we?"

"Hardly!" laughed Gilmore. "Still, the cloudy night will help us in this way—we can travel above the clouds and not be observed from below. That will help some."

"And I presume that we can crawl down the incline and get a glimpse of what's going on below," the sheriff suggested. "At least, I'm willing to try. The time to make the arrests is right now."

"Perhaps we ought to start a short time before the *Ann* leaves the place," Ben suggested, "because we'll have quite a few miles farther to travel if we circle over to look after Jimmie and Kit."

"That's very true," Havens replied. "Are you sure that you know where the summit which has been mentioned is?" he added.

"If it's the summit directly east of the south headland where we saw the light, I know exactly where it is," answered Ben. "There are two peaks there, and the one to the east and north is a trifle higher than the one referred to now."

"That's exactly correct," announced Gilmore. "The two peaks separate a great chasm in the range which is known as Two Sisters canyon."

Ben sprang to his feet and drew a bit of white paper from a pocket.

"Look here!" he shouted, "This paper was

taken from the monkey-faced man who chased Jimmie up New York bay! The fellow smashed his machine and lay with a broken arm in Robinson's barn, away back east, until Kit found a doctor to fix him up. This paper, enclosed in an envelope, fell from his pocket when his coat was removed."

"Read it!" exclaimed Gilmore excitedly.

"It isn't much to read," Ben explained. "All it says is: 'In Two Sisters Canyon'."

"There you are!" cried Carl, hopping about in his enthusiasm. "That paper makes a date, not for the meeting with the outlaws but for the meeting of the men who traveled from New York to warn them of their danger, and get them out of the country."

"That's just the idea!" the sheriff said with a laugh. "Are all your New York boys like these?" he added with a smile turning to Havens.

"I'm afraid not," was the laughing reply. "The wits of these boys were sharpened in the streets of the East Side."

Shortly after midnight Ben and Carl, accompanied by Stroup, departed in the *Bertha* for the valley where the *Louise* had been left. The clouds were thinning a little, and the darkness was not so intense as it had been earlier in the evening. Stroup knew every inch of the way, and so the machine made good progress until it came over the little

green bowl which had been the scene of so many adventures.

"There's no light there!" Ben said, with a sigh, as they passed the lip of the pit. "I don't believe there's any one here."

"There's just a little flicker of light," Stroup declared. "And it looks to me like the embers of a camp-fire."

"We didn't have any fire!" Ben explained.

"Then Jimmie and Kit must have returned," Carl put in. "They may be there yet. Of course we're going down to see?"

"That's what we came here for," Stroup answered. "Only be careful, boy, how you bring her down!"

Ben smiled at the big deputy's timidity, and brought the machine to within a few feet of the embers which had been left by the fire built to cook the outlaws' steak.

As Kit and Jimmie had left the camp two or three hours previous in the machine they had repaired, of course no one was seen about the place. Ben and Carl ran eagerly over the surface of the green bowl with their flashlights, but no trace of their chums could be found. Even the shelter tents had been taken away by the boys.

Discouraged at last, the boys returned to the machine, and the three mounted upward through the clouds, now thinning fast. The moon was rising,

too, laying a silver floor over the upper surface of the moving clouds.

"Now there's the peak!" Ben said, pointing. "And there's an aeroplane on it, too! And also a scrap!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CLUE ABOVE THE CLOUDS.

"I'LL tell you what I think," Jimmie exclaimed as the boys gazed toward the peak. "I believe that gink had busted up the *Louise*, not knowing how to run her, and that they've abandoned her there."

"Wouldn't it be a joke if we could sail over and pick her up again?" asked Kit with a grin.

"Sure it would!" answered Jimmie. "Suppose we try it."

In a moment the impulsive and foolhardy boys were starting the machine along an incline with the motors going at full speed. When she lifted it was within a few rods of the opposite peak.

Naturally the boys scrutinized the summit before them very closely, as there was still time to lift again should anything like peril appear. However, everything seemed quiet and peaceful below.

Not a moving figure was to be seen. The one light of the *Louise* burned dimly and appeared to be cloaked with a covering which did not quite perform its duty.

"It's all right!" Jimmie shouted to his companion. "We'll land close to the *Louise,* and you jump down the first thing and see if she's fit to run. If she is, you climb aboard and push the starter. If she isn't, you jump back into your seat and I'll duck away."

The next minute the wheels of the flying machine were rolling over the rough surface of the summit. Kit sprang out as directed, but Jimmie retained his seat. The instant the boy struck the ground a sharp cry of terror reached Jimmie's ears, and he also prepared for a spring.

His idea was that his chum had been seized by some one lying in wait beside the machine, and that his assistance would enable the boy to get back into his seat without injury.

However, before Jimmie could execute his purpose, a rope was thrown over his head and shoulders from behind, and he was dragged from the machine. Then, as if in a daze, he saw gathered about him three figures that he knew.

Phillips, Mendoza and the blond aviator were gazing down upon him with triumph in their faces! Behind them stood two slighter men, resembling Japanese, and behind them, in turn, quite a collection of Chinamen.

"Brought my machine back, did you?" asked the blond man.

"Yes," replied Jimmie struggling with the rope

that held his arms to his sides. "I thought you might need it."

"That's nice!" smiled the aviator.

"And so you are the boys who left New York to capture Phillips and myself are you?" demanded Mendoza thrusting a savage face toward Jimmie.

"We came out here to try something in that line," replied the boy.

"If I had known that, you would still be sleeping in the shelter-tent," the ruffian said with a significant glance.

At this moment one of the Japs turned to Phillips and asked:

"How many more Chinks are there in Two Sisters canyon?"

Jimmie gave a quick start and turned to Kit:

"Does that make you think of Robinson's barn?" he asked.

"Sure it does!" replied Kit. "It makes me think of the note I found there. I suppose that's Two Sisters canyon that we just crossed."

"Your suppose is all right, kid!" laughed the blond man.

"How many more Chinks did you say there were in Two Sisters canyon?" repeated the Jap.

"I don't know," replied Phillips. "We have nothing to do with the smuggling end of this game. We have known ever since we reached this part of the country that smuggling was going on, but we

have kept away from those engaged in it. How many Chinks were here when you landed from the crippled machine this afternoon?"

"I don't know," was the Jap's reply. "When the machine failed us here and the aviator went away to secure a spark plug from the boys, if possible, the smugglers came up and told us a long story about getting the Chinks out to-night, and they have been about here ever since. I don't know why they happened to select this peak for their operations just now."

"I'll tell you," said a rough-bearded man, approaching where the two stood. "We selected this peak because in this kind of weather it is always above the clouds, and because the country below is being raked over with a fine-toothed comb by the rangers. Under the circumstances, it appeared to me that the best thing we could do was to hide the fellows high up in the air."

"I understand now," the Jap replied. "And you say the officers are below?" he questioned. "Aiming for this peak, perhaps?"

"They certainly are!" replied the smuggler. "Listen a moment and you'll hear shooting!"

In the short silence which followed the report of firearms could be heard from below. The smuggler darted away, closely followed by the blond aviator, and the two Japs and Phillips and Mendoza began looking about for hiding-places in case a rush

should be made for the summit. They found hiding-places, at last, at the edge of the canyon which lay between the two peaks. Kit, forgotten in the sudden excitement, hastily released Jimmie from the rope which held him, and the two boys prepared to mount their machines.

Shouts and cries of anger and alarm were now heard coming up from the slope, still veiled by the clouds, and the boys were under the impression that they might be able to get the aeroplanes away before the summit became a battle-ground. Just as they were about to spring into the seats, however, a sharp cry came from the place where the four men had hidden, and the next moment a storm of bullets swept down from above!

"Je—rusalem!" shouted Jimmie, stepping out and throwing his arms up in token of surrender. "That the *Ann,* and she must be loaded with pirates! Quit shooting!" he yelled at the top of his voice.

Kit was not slow in following the example of his friend, and then the outlaws and the Japs rushed from their hiding-places and also held up their hands in token of submission.

The next instant the powerful aeroplane, *Ann,* swept down upon the surface with a force which almost sent her off on the other side! The sheriff, the ranger and Havens sprang from their seats with

revolvers in their hands, and by this time Jimmie and Kit had their own weapons out.

Almost before the four men could catch their breath, they were handcuffed by the sheriff.

"And that," exclaimed Havens, "is about the neatest and slickest capture I ever heard of!"

"If you fellows hadn't mixed up with the smugglers," the sheriff said to Phillips, "you might have chased about here a good many more days yet without being taken."

"We didn't mix up with the smugglers!" growled Phillips. "They mixed up with us!"

By this time the firing below had in a measure ceased, and Gilmore hastened down a break in the clouds which looked to those above almost like a trap door into a dark basement. He returned in a few moments with a smile on his face.

"The boys we sent to make the attack from below," he said, "have captured a score of Chinamen and all the smugglers, including a blond aviator who says he came from New York."

"Well, boys," Mr. Havens said with a smile, "we may as well get the machines ready for a visit to Westchester county. It appears to me that the case is closed. The sheriff will, of course, attend to the extradition proceedings and deliver the prisoners over to the New York officers. Our work is finished."

If looks of rage and hate could kill, then Havens

would certainly have been murdered at that instant, for the four prisoners glared at him as if holding him responsible for all their troubles.

"For your information, boys," Havens said, "I'll tell you that the DeMotts and their crowd of abductors and river thieves have all been captured since the night they entertained me on board the *Nancy*."

"You've got nothing against us after you get us to New York!" Mendosa declared. "You can't prove anything!"

This remark seemed to bring an idea to the mind of the fellow, for he began cautiously feeling about in his vest pockets with his manacled hands.

Watching him closely, Ben saw Mendoza take something from his left-hand vest pocket, drop it to the ground and move forward to crush it under his foot. The boy sprang forward and rescued the object, which was wrapped in thin tissue paper.

The boy tore the paper away and held a diamond ring with four small diamond settings showing. There was a place for the fifth setting, but it was empty. Havens took the ring into his hand and examined it carefully. Then he faced Mendoza with a smile.

"No proof against you?" he exclaimed. "This is the ring you wore on the night you burglarized the Buyers' Bank and murdered the watchman. All

the criminal officers in New York know the ring as well as they know your ugly face."

"And what has the ring to do with it?" demanded the prisoner.

"And here," Havens continued taking a slender roll of tissue paper from his pocket, "are the stone and the gold claw broken from the ring on the night of the robbery and murder. They were found by the police on the rug in front of the desk in the bank where you divided the stolen securities. And so," continued the millionaire, "you are convicted at last by the Clue Above the Clouds!"

For the purposes of this narrative the famous murder case closed there. It is of little interest to explain how the Flying Machine Boys returned to New York, or how they received a goodly portion of the reward offered for the capture of the smugglers. In fact, the boys were so busy planning another trip that they nearly lost interest in the murder case as soon as they reached Havens' hangar in Westchester county!

They appeared as witnesses at the trial of the man who had been shot on the night the destruction of the hangar was attempted, and were well satisfied when he received a sentence of five years at Sing Sing.

The man's confession revealed the names of the New York parties who had been concerned in the

attempt to prevent the Flying Machine Boys from departing on their mission to the Pacific coast.

These criminals were all arrested and punished with the De Mott gang, and, after the electrocution of Phillips and Mendoza, the famous criminal combination was heard of no more.

With all the cases settled, the boys pushed their arrangements for another trip in their machines. Kit, of course, assisted in all the preliminaries, and the boys often declared that the finding of him was worth the trip to the Pacific!

The next adventures of the boys will be recorded in the next volume of this series entitled:

"The Flying Machine Boys in the Wilds; or, the Mystery of the Andes."

THE END.

S0-CPS-595